SITARAM

(An English Translation of the Bengali novel by Bankim Chandra Chatterji)

BY

SIB CHANDRA MUKERJI.

PUBLISHED BY

THE SCHOOL BOOK & USEFUL LITERATURE SOCIETY,

CALCUTTA.

Preface.

It, no doubt, amounts to an unpardonable vanity and gross presumption on the part of one of my humble attainments to venture to place this translation—faulty in more respects than one, as it is bound to be—before the public; far more so, to intend it for the recreation of European and other readers, whose, mother tongue is not Bengalee, but who can meet on a common platform with the natives of Lower Bengal through the medium of English. But the temptation to enable the latter class of readers to have an idea, however imperfect, of our idolized Bankim's rare qualities of head—his capacity to mature plots, his acquaintance with the various types of human nature, his power of vivid description, his close adherence to the central object, and the facility and grace of his writing—in short, all those attributes which singled him out as the greatest of all Bengalee writers of fiction—has goaded me on to incur the risk.

The closing scene of Bankim's life was busy with a systematic and scholarly study of the *Gita*—the immortal evidence of Aryan culture—the solace of senility of every sentient existence. To my mind, 'Sitaram' seems to be an illustration of some of its doctrines. However diversified educated Bengalee opinion may be as to the merits of this novel, and there are critics, who do not disguise their opinion as to its inferiority, in one respect it

ought, I think, to be unanimous, and that is, that as an illustration of the Doctrine of Superiority of action, in whatever sphere of life, (*Gita* XXVII., 3-7) as well as of the disastrous consequences, resulting from thinking too much of the object of senses, (*Gita* XXVI. 62-63) no other writer, however talented, could have been more successful.

Utmost care has been taken to render this translation as literal as the very nature of the task itself has permitted me to do. However, the public is the arbiter of its destiny ; and in its hands, I place it unclad and unadorned—without any embellishment to set it off to advantage.

Owing to a good deal of inconvenience in the correction of proofs, the work abounds with mistakes, for which the generous public will, it is hoped, indulgently make allowance.

BHOOKOYLAS,
October, 1903.

S. C. M.

To
the memory of
my departed mother,
who,
in a comparatively humble life,
evinced
a loftiness of soul, seldom possessed by her
contemporary women
even of higher ranks;
whose
unremitting care
and
anxious solicitude
for her offsprings were equalled only by her readiness to subject herself to privations
and
mortifications for their welfare;
and who,
in a mother's tenderness
for children,
was really altruistic,
this
humble attempt at serious authorship
is inscribed
in token of affection and reverence
by me,
her unworthly and hapless son.

SITARAM.

ERRATA.

PART I.

PAGE	LINE	FOR	READ
,, (Foot-note)	2	and	to
13	34	could	could not
20	29	preparation	preparations
23	1	oulskirt	outskirts
25	24	Fauzdar	Faquir
30	28	the covert	covert
32	13	sound	sounds
34	11	did	had
,,	,,	mix	mixed
41	15	powers	power
64	15	partition	perdition
66	8	bergain,	bargain.
68	17	artisans	artizans,
69	14	row	now

PART II.

PAGE	LINE	FOR	READ
90	32	on	to
96	30	Perceiving	Perceiving,
104	23	army in that case	army, in that case
110	12	hour	hour"
119	12	apartment, the next time	apartment the next time,
125	19	after 'road' read, 'and'	
,,	20	Omit "and" after "powders"	
134	17	appearence	appearance
139	10	naught	nought
140	7	doors	door
146	14	naught	nought
150	13	dome	*Dome*
152	5	closetted	closeted
,,	18	Between 'with' and 'defence' read 'the'	

PART III.

PAGE	LINE	FOR	READ
160	4	led	had led
161	31	naught	nought
162	21	did not do	had not done
168	23	sex	sex,

PAGE	LINE	FOR	READ
171 ...	22 ...	off ...	the arms of
,, ...	24 ...	But ...	but
174 ...	17 ...	and ...	an
175 ...	4 ...	She ...	He
178 ...	28 ...	naught ...	nought
179 ...	13 ...	nothing ...	nothing,
180 ...	3 ...	may ...	mayst
182 ...	17 ...	exist !" ...	exist !
189 ...	10 ...	naught ...	nought
192 (Foot-note)	† ...	An ...	A Paramhangsha is an
,, ...	‡ ...	A ...	A Brahmachari is a
202 ...	2 ...	contended ...	contented
209 ...	12 ...	for ...	of
,, ...	23 ...	growing ...	gaining
210 ...	13 ...	split ...	spilt
214 ...	26 ...	them ...	him
216 ...	23 ...	untimely ...	untimely
217 ...	7 ...	originated ...	had originated
,, ...	17 ...	environed ...	had environed
,, ...	18 ...	acted ...	had acted
,, ...	34 ...	turned ...	had turned
218 ...	20 ...	sought ...	had sought
223 ...	18 ...	occurance ...	occurrence
226 ...	34 ...	Fresh ...	flesh
228 ...	14 ...	descernible ..	discernible
229 ...	2 ...	attitude ...	altitude
,, ...	24 ...	very ...	every
232 ...	37 ...	notes ...	tones
235 ...	18 ...	add ...	and
237 ...	8 ...	sallied ...	had sallied
,, ...	11 ...	vanished ...	had vanished
241 ...	5 ...	one,— ...	one—
,, ...	7 ...	it,— ...	it,
243 ...	9 ...	creature ...	creatures
244 ...	7 ...	readers ...	reader
,, ...	30 ...	his ...	the
245 ...	4 ...	alter ...	altar
249 ...	25 ...	Original ...	original
251 ...	6 ...	die ...	to die
252 ...	3 ...	cannon ...	the cannon
255 ...	27 ...	on and on ...	on and on ;
,, ...	,, ...	after 'on and on' read 'and'	
,, ...	32 ...	Omit 'the' after 'placed'	
,, ...	33 ...	cannon ...	cannons
,, ...	,, ...	Between 'of' and 'castle' read 'the	
256 ...	34 ...	this ...	the

SITARAM

PART I.

THE DAY: IN THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

SITARAM

PART I.

THE DAY: IN THE DOMESTIC CIRCLE

CHAPTER I

In by-gone times, there stood, in eastern Bengal, a city, known by the name of Bhusana. Its present name is *Bhusno.* At a time, when the cottagers of the little hamlet of Calcutta could not venture out, after night-fall, for fear of tigers, that Bhusana was a very prosperous town. It was the residence of one of the Fauzdars. Fauzdars were the heads of Local Governments ; their emolument was much higher than that of the Provincial Governors of the present time. Bhusana was, accordingly, the capital of a fairly large administrative area.

Nearly one hundred and four score years prior to the date of our narrative, a Mahamedan Faquir was lying, one day at an early hour in the morning, or rather towards the close of the night, on the passage in one of the narrow alleys of Bhusana, in such a manner as to close it to traffic, when a way-farer rushed up to the spot. The pedestrian was in a great hurry ; but seeing, that the way before him was thus blocked, he stopped short very much distressed at heart.

The foot passenger was a Hindoo; by caste he was a Kayastha belonging to that part of Bengal, popularly known as the northern *Rarh.** He answered to the name of Gangaram Dass, and was

* In former times Bengal was divided into four parts :—*Rarh*, *Barendra*, *Banga*, and *Bagri*. The localities within the Burdwan Division were called *Rarh*.

young in age. Gangaram was in a terrible danger. His mother lay in a precarious state at home—her last hour was at hand. He was, therefore, making the best of his way to the house of the *kabiraj* (physician). He, however, saw, that his further onward career was thus prevented.

In those times members of the Mahamedan mendicant fraternity were held in great esteem. Even Akbar Shah himself, with all his want of touch with the Islamite faith, suffered himself to be at the command of one of these Faquirs. The Hindoos revered them: those that were not influenced by kindred sentiments, at least stood in terror of them. Gangaram did not dare leap over the Faquir. He said :—"*Salaam, Shaha Shahib*, give me a little way to go !"

The *Shaha Shahib* did not move; nor did he vouchsafe a reply. Gangaram united the palms of his hands and repeated :—"The Almighty will be pleased with you; I am in an awful danger—give me a little way."

Still the Faquir stirred not: Gangaram besought, entreated and gave vent to the anguished feelings of his heart. But nothing could melt the mendicant; he remained speechless as before. To avoid further loss of time, Gangaram leaped over the Faquir and went away upon his mission. While leaping over the mendicant, Gangaram's feet came in contact with his body, (or it was the mischief-making propensity of the Faquir). Gangaram was in a great hurry. Without, therefore, uttering a word he made straight for the house of the physician. The Faquir also rose and took the direction of the Kazi's house.

Meeting the *kabiraj* at home, Gangaram brought him into his own house. The physician saw his mother, felt her pulse, recited medical texts, hinted on medicines, but finally prescribed the bottom of the *toolashi** plant. There, at the foot of the *toolashi*, with the name of *Hari* on her lips, was Gangaram's mother translated to the other world. Gangaram now sallied forth to call in the assistance of his neighbours, to perform the cremation of his parent. By a few of Gangaram's own caste, his mother's funeral was attended to according to the prescribed form.

---

*Ocimum Villosium.

After the cremation, Gangaram was returning home towards the close of the day, with his sister, Sree, and the neighbours, when a couple of *paiks*, armed with shields and spears, came up and arrested him. These *paiks* were *Domes* ;* and Gangaram felt very much shocked at their touch. With a heart, fluttering with fear, he saw, that the *paiks* were accompanied by the Faquir of the previous night. Gangaram asked :—"Whither am I to go ? Wherefore arrest me ? What have I done ?"

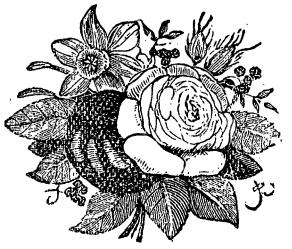
The Faquir vociferated :—"*Qafer, Badbukht, Vetamiz, chul !*" (move on, thou wretched, undistinguishing infidel.)

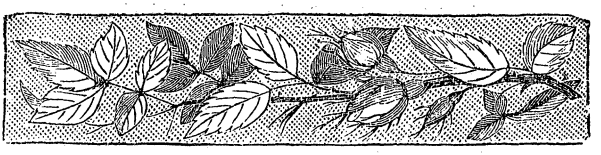
The *paiks* echoed :—"Come along." One of the *paiks* hurled Gangaram down upon the ground with a push on his neck, while the other dealt on him a few kicks. One of them began to secure Gangaram with a cord, while his comrade ran to arrest his sister. She, however, ran as fast as her legs could carry her. The accompanying neighbours took to their heels, so that nobody could hunt them out. Having secured Gangaram, the *paiks* led him on into the presence of the Kazi, all the way beating and striking him. The Faquir accompanied the party and, on the way, expatiated on the bad morals of the Hindoos, in speeches, couched in the most incomprehensible terms of the Persian, or Arabic stock.

As soon as Gangaram was brought before the Kazi, his trial commenced. The complainant was the *Shaha Shahib ;* the witness, the same *Shaha Shahib ;* and the judge, the self-same *Shaha Shahib.* The Kazi had risen and left the seat to him ; and on the latter concluding his story, he announced the order, after an elaborate review of the *Koran*, his own pair of spectacles, and the long descending beard of the Faquir, that Gangaram was to be buried alive. Every body present shuddered. Gangaram said unto himself:—"What is inevitable has come to pass ; why, then, should I keep my heart's grievance ?" and he kicked the Faquir right in the face. The Faquir buried his countenance in his hands, and, with the words "*Toba, Toba*" on his lips, fell prostrate on the ground. Of a couple or two of teeth, that yet remained to him in this shady side of existence, the majority obtained salvation at this touch of Gangaram's feet. The

* One of the lowest castes of the Hindoo society.

accompanying *paiks* ran after Gangaram, caught hold of him and, at the order of the Kazi, put handcuffs on his wrists and chains on his legs, and began abusing him in words quite inexplicable. They then marched him off into the prison amidst a regular shower of blows and fisticuffs and kicks. It was nearly dusk ; and nothing further could be done that day. In the morning he was to be interred alive.





CHAPTER II

The news of this reached at the place, where, stretched at the foot of the tree, and rolling in dust with dishevelled hair, Gangaram's sister was weeping. Sister was told that her brother was to be consigned to the earth alive in the morning. She then rose to a sitting posture and, wiping her eyes, gathered the flowing mass of her disordered hair.

Gangaram's sister, Sree, was five and twenty years of age. She was the younger of two children. In this world Gangaram had none else but his mother and Sree. During the last stage of her existence, Gangaram's mother was severely ill, and Sree had become the mistress of the household. Sree was not a widow, but, as Fate had it, she was deprived of the society of her husband.

In the house there was a *salagram.** With a tiny piece of offering, the daily tiny worship of this idol was performed. Sree and her mother believed this *salagram* to be the Almighty Himself. After confining the disordered mass of her hair in a knot, Sree now advanced up to the door of the room in which the idol was kept and, without crossing the threshold, made innumerable obeisance to it in mind. Then joining her hands she said:—"O *Narayana* ! O God ! O Thou, the Friend of the friendless ! the Support of the destitute ! mayst thou succour me in the bold step, I am going to take to-day. I am a woman—a sinful woman. What can be expected from me ? Look after it, God that thou art ! "

Having prayed in this strain, Sree withdrew from the spot and emerged from the house. She had a neighbour in an aged female,

* A particular and rare kind of stone ball, of dark colour, varying in weihgt from two and four ounces, which, in consequence of the existence of a figure, called the *chakra* (disc) in an opening, with which it is provided naturally, is said to symbolize Visnu.

going by the epithet of Panchcowry's Mother. Having been on the term of helping Sree's mother, in the performance of many a little domestic duty, this woman stood well with the family. Sree now called upon her and said something to her in whispers. They then strolled into the high road and, threading a number of lanes and bye-lanes in the dark, achieved a great distance. In times of which we are spreaking, there were masonry buildings very few and far between. Still, however, their number was much greater than at present. Here and there a few big specimens of architecture, too, could be met with. Sree and her companion came up and stopped in front of one of such buildings. It had a tank on the opposite side with flights of steps. There—seated on these steps—a number of gate-keepers was engaged in a variety of occupations. One of them was brewing *siddhi* ; * another was humming an air ; while the third was concentrating his mind on the subject of *Home*, upon which the fourth was dwelling. One of these men, did the old woman accost, and said :—"*Pandé Thacoor*, do ask the *Bhandari* to come hither for a few minutes."

The man thus addressed answered :—"I am not a *Pandé*. I am a *Misser* ."

Punchcowry's Mother :—Ah ! I did not know it, my son ! What's the worth of a Brahmin who is a *Pandé* ? What a good Brahmin is a *Misser* !

The worthy *Misser* was mightily pleased to hear this and asked :—"What should you do with the *Bhandari* ?"

Panchcowry's Mother :—What else should I do ? Some vegetables, such as gourds, pumpkins &c., have grown in my house. So I want to tell the *Bhandari* to go to-morrow and fetch them.

"Very well" observed the gate-keeper. "I'll tell him that ; you may go home."

The woman replied :—"Yes, but how he is to know to whose house to go for them ?"

The *Darwan* :—In that case you may tell me your name and depart.

---

* Dried leaves of hemp, which, ground into a paste and mixed with water, forms an intoxicating drink.

"Go to, the son of an unlucky dam!" vociferated the old woman. "I would have given you one of the gourds; but your fate seems to be against you."

At this the up-country man said :—"All right, you just wait here while I go and fetch the *Bhandari*."

The man then began to hum a song in *Piloo** and, on getting inside the building, promptly informed Jiban Bhandari, that a vegetable-woman had called. That he himself was in a goodly chance of getting something, that the house-keeper might as well get his perquisites, and that the latter should, therefore, come quick.

Jiban, the house-keeper, was a man of advanced age. A number of keys depended from his waist-band. His features were sharp. In expectation of getting something, he came out in a moment and met the two women, who were waiting out-side. He said :—"Well, who has called me, my good women!"

Panchcowry's mother replied :—"Well, there have grown, in my house, some vegetables. You my take some for yourself, the second part you are to give to this *darwanji* here, and the rest to the *Sarkar*."

Jiban Bhandari said :—"Tell me, then, where thou livest, and I'll go in the morning."

The woman then added :—"And here's a friendless daughter of misery. Pray, listen to what she has got to say."

Sree, with her veil drawn so as to reach her neck, stood aside, merging into the wall itself. Jiban Bhandari turned his eyes towards her and gruffly said :—"I dare not bring applications for alms and charities like that to the notice of my lord."

In whispered accents the old woman then observed.—"If she gets any charity at all, she shall give half of it to you."

The countenance of Jiban Bhandari brightened up at this, and he asked :—"Well what's it, that you want to say, my child!"

Having raised her head and shortened her veil a little, but very much influenced by bashfulness, Sree, some-how or other managed to deliver herself of what she had got to say. But her utterances were so much suppresed, that the house-keeper could scarcely comprehend

---

* One of the various tunes with which native music is noted.

her. He then said to Panchcowry's Mother :—"What does the girl say ? I can't hear anything."

Panchcowry's Mother then interpreted the matter and said :—"She says, says she, that the thing, she is going to entrust in your hand, you shall deliver into the hands of your master. Whatever your master says, you shall tell her on your return ; you'll find her on this very spot."

Sree then took a *mohar** from the waist-encircling part of the cloth, she had on at the time, and on her making it over to Panchcowry's Mother, the latter put it into the hand of the house-keeper. He then disappeared in a moment. On getting the vestibule, Jiban Bhandari observed the piece of gold, by the light of the lamp, that burnt there, and found it to be a gold *mohar* of the reign of Akbar Shah. But there was the sign of a trident upon the coin. "This woman," thought Jiban within himself, "has by no means come to receive alms. On the contrary, she has called to give alms to my master. Master is a man of wealth and, as such, does not stand in need of gold. Better far, that this shining piece should find its way into the trunk of Jiban Bhandari. But this sign of a trident, that I find on it ! 'Tis ten to one, that 'twill lead to ultimate detection. Oh no ! such a bent of mind, on the part of a poor man like myself, is not good. Proper course is, therefore, to take the coin over to him, to whom it legitimately belongs." Having reasoned with himself, in this way, the house-keeper curbed his avarice and carried the gold to where, reclining on a cushion, his master was indulging in the smoke of perfumed weeds of tobacco, and informed him of everything in detail.

Jiban Bhandari's master was a handsome youth of 30 years of age, well-built, and a perfect *Kartikeya*† of beauty. He examined the gold for a while in the light. Then, heaving a deep sigh, he exclaimed :—"*Durgé* ! what's this ?"

Jiban Bhandari said :—"What am I to say ?"

His master added :—"Fetch the individual, who has sent this coin. Who else is there ?"

---

* A gold coin, the value whereof varied from Rs. 16 to 25 of our time.

† *Kartikeya* is said to be the son of *Durga*. In the Hindoo mythology he is mentioned as the Generalissimo of the gods. He is represented as seated on a large cock and very beautiful in person.

With a view to conceal the matter of the vegetable, the housekeeper responded :—"A fisher-woman."

"See that this woman gets no access here, and you yourself are to withdraw the moment you usher the individual, who has sent in this coin," was the master's injunction.

Jiban Bhandari, then, retired and, in a few moments, came back and ushered Sree.

Sree advanced up to the door and stopped. She was veiled—trembling like an aspen leaf. The master of the house said :—"I am Sitaram Roy ; who art thou ? Thy countenance is veiled, and thou dost not speak. How, then, am I to know who thou art ?"

Sree now removed the veil. Sitaram saw before him a woman, whose countenance, though flooded in tears like a lotus, bathed in copious showers of rain, was of stainless beauty. He said :—"Why, thou art Sree !"

Sree burst into an agony of tears.

Sitaram added :—"Wherefore hast thou appeared before me after the lapse of so many years ? And, when once come, why dost thou cry like that ?"

The tears were still gushing forth from Sree's eyes—her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth.

Sitaram again said :—"There, come near me !"

Sree now spoke in a soft tone and said :—"I'll not tread upon the bedding—I am in mourning."

Sitaram was surprized, and he asked :—"What dost thou mean ?"

In a choked voice, and with tearful eyes, Sree now stammered forth :—"My mother has breathed her last."

Sitaram :—And plunged into that danger, thou hast come to me to-day—hast thou not ?

Sree :—No such thing ; whatever is to be done towards the spiritual advancement of my parent, I will do by myself, and will not trouble you. But another formidable danger has befallen me to-day.

Sitaram :—Well, what danger is that ?

Sree :—My brother is nearly done for ; the Kazi has sentenced him to be buried alive. He is in prison at this moment.

Sitaram :—What dost thou mean ? What did thy brother do ?

In a mild intonation of voice, and with tears in her eyes, Sree,

then, narrated whatever had come to her knowledge and whatever she had seen. After she had concluded her story, Sitaram heaved a profound sigh and said :—"Well, then, what's to be done now ?"

Sree :—That rests entirely with you. That's why I've appeared before you after so many years.

Sitaram :—What can I do ?

"What can *you* do ?" echoed Sree, "who then can do ? I know you can do everything."

Sitaram :—This Kazi is the servant of the Emperor of Delhi. Who, then, wields the power to prove rebellious to the Emperor ?

Sree :—Is there nothing to save him, then ?

Sitaram fell into a profound reflection. After a long time, he broke the silence and said ;—"Yes, there is a means. I can save your brother, but at the cost of my own life."

Sree :—Look here! there is God—there is Divine justice—there is Narayana. None of these facts is untrue. And if you save a poor helpless individual, nothing will go amiss with you. Besides, who will save a Hindoo, if a Hindoo does not save him ?

Sitaram again shut himself up into a musing. After ramaining silent for sometime, he said ;—"Thou hast struck the right chord—"Who will save a Hindoo, if a Hindoo does not save him ?" I promise, I will strain a point in behalf of Gangaram."

With a light heart, Sree then adjusted her veil and tripped away. Sitaram also gave instructions to his servants not to disturb him till he opened the door, and shut himself up in his apartment. He was thinking :—

"Who will save a Hindoo, if a Hindoo, does not save him ?"

CHAPTER III

Nearly a couple of hours later, Sitaram opened the door and, calling Jiban Bhandari, he said ;—"Go and summon Mrinmaya."

This individual belonged to the same caste with Sitaram. He was his relation, and very much obedient and attached to him. His well-built form, and the great amount of physical power and courage, of which he was possessed, were the topic of general talk. As desired, he appeared before Sitaram and asked ;—"Wherefore am I summoned ?"

Sitaram answered :—"There's something of paramount importance—my family is to be removed from here."

Mrinmaya asked ;—"When ?"

"To-night—within the hour that is passing," was Sitaram's reply.

Mrinmaya enquired ;—"Whither am I to take it ?"

Sitaram then gave him the necessary instructions on the point and entered the female apartment of the mansion.

In this quarter, surrounded by four wings of buildings, there was a spacious yard, having raised platforms on all the four sides. At one spot of these platforms, a huge, corpulent and dark-skinned servant-woman, being seated on the wooden pedestal of a *bonti**, while dressing fishes, was attempting to extinguish the little spark of vitality, that yet glimmered in their bosom. At another, a large-teated milch cow, taking an admixture of vegetables and plantain-leaves into her mouth, was complacently ruminating with half-closed eyelids, (we cannot say, if Frederic William IV. had so much pleasant satisfaction, on making himself possessed of the city of Paris, because he could not ruminate). At one spot again, a piebald cat, being seated on the tail, a little way off from the

* A large blade, sharpened on one side, attached perpendicularly to a piece of wood, and used for culinary purposes in all Hindoo houses.

basket containing fishes, was closely watching for a single moment of inattention on the part of the servant-woman, occupied in dressing them. At another, a sneaking dog was slily looking for a room, the doors of which stood wide open. At one spot, a large number of children, gathered round a single dish of rice, was occupied in making a meal, at the sweet persuasions of an aged female relative, in spite of gratified appetite. At another, another party of boys and girls, finishing their meal and being otherwise successful in their respective daily occupations, was lying upon one of that class of mats, known by the name of *Saturia*, stretched for them in moon-light, cooled down by the cool and fickle breath of the zephyr, and hearing over a tale from an old woman already heard a thousand times. At a third, young ladies and girls, while about such kinds of domestic duties, as dressing vegetables, preparing condiments and so forth, were talking to each other of their respective hopes, and expectations, and bliss, and beauty, and good luck, when, like the untimely gathering of clouds, like rains at the time of walking in the park, like an uninvited friend at the hour of woful thoughts, like a physician at the time of slumber, like an invitation to a dinner after a surfeit, and like a beggar, when the purse has beheld its bottom, did Sitaram make his appearance in that quarter.

"Well what's this noise about, my good people?" asked Sitaram. But no sooner had the words fallen from his lips, than the servant-woman, engaged in dressing fishes, stopped her work; and while she was fumbling with her winding-sheet to cover her hitherto bare head, the cat, that was looking for a loop-hole, took the head of a fish and slipped into the desired nook. On hearing the voice of the master of the house, another servant-wench rushed upon the cow, eating plantain-leaves with half-closed eyes and, calling her mistress by the name of one, who had lost her eyes &c, began to play the devil with her. The children, who, at the inducement of the aged female-relative, were engaged in making a meal as aforesaid, seeing, that the beauty of the story told by her was marred at the sudden appearance of the lord of the house, found fault with the eatables and, in unwashed mouths, began to scatter in every direction. The party of children, who, after making a meal, had fixed their mind on some story, lying upon a bed, rendered cool by the light of the

"cloudless lamp of night," now commenced adverse criticisms on the story, as it was interrupted suddenly. Damsels, who were engaged in dressing vegetables, were performing their respective duties in a dim light. Still, however, they now lengthened their veil. It proved hard lines with girls, engaged in preparing condiments—it would be indelicate to create so much noise from the strokes, unavoidable in their task. On the other hand, what should the master of the house think of them, if they stopped their work outright? With those, that were looking after the boiling of the milk, it proved harder yet—their attention being a little diverted, all the milk ran over the brim of the caldron in which it was simmering.

"Now, then, will any of you go to bathe in the Ganges, my people?" asked Sitaram, when, "Father I'll go!" "Brother, I'll go!" "uncle, I'll go!" and similar replies came from all sides. Women of all ages—from the decrepit down to the infant—echoed in the same breath, "I'll go." Undressed fishes being left without proper care, now began to captivate canine and feline hearts. Nobody paid any heed to the large quantities of vegetables, dressed with so much care—the ruminating cow began to take them into her mouth with protruded tongue and send them down the throat. The milk, that was boiling in charge of one, was burnt; another tripped over the grinding stones; while the child of the third created an immense confusion, with its cries. But all these things passed quite unheeded.

"Then let every one of you go" returned Sitaram. "But look here" he added, "there's no time to be lost. This night is very auspicious for the purpose of undertaking a journey. After meal, therefore, you are to start. So you'd better make the necessary preparations, while yet there's time."

Having thus spoken, Sitaram withdrew from the place and, in due time, made his appearance before his wife. But the term wife is not appropriate under the circumstances of the case, because it is in the singular number, whereas Sitaram had two wives. However, in the Bengalee grammar, there is no dual number, and both the wives could be seen at one and the same time. Imploring, therefore, the forgiveness of grammarians, we have applied the term wife.

As already stated, Sitaram had two wives. They called them Satyabhama and Rukmini. But whether the character of these two

ladies did, in any way, resemble that of ladies of those names, mentioned in the *Mahabharat*, is not known to us. The lady, to whom Sitaram came presently, was Nanda, popularly called Satyabhama.

From behind a screen, Nanda had heard everything, as detailed above. No sooner, therefore, had Sitaram made his appearance before her than she said;—"Well, why is this bustle over a bathing in the Ganges all on a sudden?"

Sitarm did not vouchsafe a direct reply to the query of his elder spouse, but said;—"'Ganges, O Ganges' who says as a rule—"

But Nanda interrupted him and said;—"Yes; yes; I know it. Let her always remain on my head. But wherefore is this sudden revival of the sentiment of reverence for her?"

Sitaram:—Look here! in the same proportion, that I am responsible for your weal in this word, am I liable for your happiness in the next. There is a *yog** at hand. Should I not send you for a wash in the sacred stream?

Nanda:—But of what avail is a bath in the Ganges to us, when you are near—you, who, to us, are equal to all the sacred shrines in the world? If I only sip a drop of the water, in which you have washed your feet, the result shall be all the same as that of bathing in the Ganges a hundred times.

Sitaram:—Oh, no matter! If you don't want to go, you are at liberty to remain here. Do only let them go, who wish to go.

Nanda:—Let'em go—let everybody go. I'll stay here all alone. Only, I will be a little swayed by the fear of spectres. But there's no help for it. Now, let all these things be put out of the question for the present, if you please. Will you tell me what the matter really is?

Sitaram:—You do not mean to say, that I am in the habit of misrepresenting things?

Nanda:—Yes, but I do though; in as much as I know, you always seek to convince us, that you've fried an *uchchhe*† when in reality you've fried a *patol*.‡

---

* A union of some auspicious stars.

† A kind of vegetables, which is cooked and eaten.

‡ Do. Do. Do.

Sitaram :—But frying an *uchchhe*, I never seek to convince you, that I've fried a *patol*.

Nanda :—No, you never do that, at least ; but 'tis all the same in the end, the effect being concealment. 'Tis concealment of facts, that torments us. Now, then, will you speak the truth ?

Sitaram :—Certainly I would have done, if only it had admitted of being made generally known.

Nanda's countenance now became something like an over-clouded sky—like a full-blown lotus, filled in with water—like a mirror, on the surface of which vapours had gathered. With a voice, choked and rendered full with emotion, Nanda said :—"Very well, let that go, then. Only tell me, who 'twas, that called upon you this evening ?

Sitaram :—Generally speaking, a large number of people comes to me, and a good many came this evening.

Nanda :—Who was the woman that called ?

Sitaram :—Of women, too, a large number. To settle the matter of rent, to beg alms in distress, a number of women comes to me. Women generally call in the evening.

Nanda :—Yes, but how many called this evening ?

"Only one" was Sitaram's answer.

Nanda :—Who was she ?

Sitaram :—Her brother is in point of death.

Nanda :—Well, that's not the thing I want. Who was she ?

Sitaram :—I'll tell you another day.

The vapours, that had gathered on the surface of the mirror, were now reduced into drops of water—Satyabhama melted into tears. Sitaram then took her by the chin and, bestowing the tenderest caresses on her, left the chamber.

Leaving Nanda, Sitaram now appeared where, with a looking-glass placed in front, his younger wife, the charming and worshipful Rama, was occupied in bringing into order the thin, braid-like stuff of hair of the jettest black. Rama was younger than Nanda in age as well as in physique, and, as such, she appeared to be very much younger. Like the river Ganges towards the end of the rains, were Nanda's charms and youth both fully matured, whereas Rama, like a little ornamental streamlet in a vernal grove, was yet undeveloped

in both these respects, Nanda's complexion was dark like heated gold, that of Rama, fair like moon-light, reflected in a dew-drop. Sitaram presently approached this lady and said;—"Rukmini! have you heard anything of the proposed bathing in the Ganges?"

Rama :—O, hush! is such language to be uttered!

Sitaram :—Hush what? The bathing or the name Rukmini?

Rama :—She is a divine being—Luckshmy; and what's that one name, which does not come to my memory?

Sitaram :—Oh! you allude to the story of Sisupala—don't you? But let that alone. Now, what about this bathing in the Ganges? Has it reached your ears?

Rama :—Yes, it has.

Sitaram :—Do you mean to go?

Rama :—That's why I am bringing these braids of hair into order.

Sitaram :—But wherefore should you go at all, when I am near—I, who, to you, am equal to all the shrines in the universe?"

Rama :—Should you forbid, I'd not go.'

Sitaram :—Wherefore, then, these preparations?

Rama :—Because you wanted, that we should go.

Sitaram :—I never wanted anybody to go; I was simply asking if anybody would go? Will you go?

Rama :—Will *you* go?

Sitaram :—I will.

Rama :—In that case will I also go.

Sitaram :—But I will not accompany you, I'll join you somewhere in the way.

Rama :—Who, then, will accompany us?

Sitaram :—Mrinmaya will escort you.

Rama :—Be it so. But will you tell me a single thing?

Sitaram :—Well, what's it?

Rama :—What's your business?

Sitaram :—Can everything be made known?

Rama now threw her arms round Sitaram's body and said;—"You must tell me. You are very daring, and I apprehend, you will do something rash and are, therefore, seeking to remove us from your way."

Sitaram simulated anger, dragged Rama by her hair-knot, made as if he would give her a slap, and, at last, shook her by the nose. He then said ;—"True, I'll do something very rash ; but there's no fear."

Rama :—You may have no fear, but I have. Is there any difference between your fear and my own ? Well, listen to me ; going for a bath in the Ganges is stopped. You are confined in this apartment of mine for the present.

While thus speaking, Rama bolted the door and leaned against it. She then resumed ;—"If you want to go, just tread upon my throat. Now tell me, who called upon you this evening ?"

Sitaram was very much surprised. He said ;—"Are your spies going the round of the house all the day long ?"

Rama :—The worthy Bhandari has been disappointed in the expectation of getting some vegetables. So we have come to know all about the matter. Now, then, tell me, who it was.

Sitaram :—Sree.

Rama :—Ah ! was it Sree ? Wherefore did she call ?

Sitaram :—She had alms to beg.

Rama :—Did she get it ?

Sitaram :—Do you ever turn out a beggar ?

Rama :—Oh, then it seems she got it ! What did you give her ?

Sitaram :—I did not give her anything ; but I have promised I will give.

Rama :—May I not know what you mean to give her ?

Sitaram :—Not at present. Now, then, leave the door.

Rama :—Unless you tell me all the particulars, I will not leave the door.

Sitaram :—Then listen. The Kazi has sentenced Sree's brother to be buried alive. Sree begs, that I may save her brother, and I have promised that much.

Rama :—So, we are all to go to bathe in the Ganges, and, while we are thus removed, you may freely fight with the Fauzdar's men !

Sitaram :—What business have you to meddle with matters like this, women that you are ?

Rama :—Business indeed ! No, none. Only this, that I'll not go about a wash in the river.

Having delivered herself in this way, Rama seated herself more firmly still on the door-way. Sitaram besought, entreated and importuned.

Rama there-upon said :—"Then hold out a promise to me, and I'll get out of your way !"

Sitaram :—Well, tell me what you want.

Rama :—That on behalf of Sree's brother you'll do whatever can be done without having recourse to quarrels, or broils, or fights. Promise this much—

Sitaram :—I'm quite agreeable to that. Quarrels and broils are not my legitimate occupation, nor have I the least inclination to make myself a party to any such thing. But I've serious misgivings as to the endeavours being ever crowned with success.

Rama :—Never mind the issue of your attempts. Only promise, you'll do whatever can be done without weapons.

Sitaram reflected for sometime and then said :—" Yes, I promise."

Rama was satisfied and, getting out of the way of her husband, she said :—Then we need not go about a wash in the Ganges ?"

Sitaram replied :—"Since the proposal has been started, I think you'd better go."

A cloud of dissatisfaction flitted over the countenance of Rama ; but she remained silent. Sitaram, too, without speaking anything more, issued from the house and did not come back.

CHAPTER IV

Sitaram had a preceptor. He belonged to the priestly caste and to the school of Hindoo philosophers. His toilette consisted of a piece of silken cloth, called the *tasar*,* and a *namabali*. † All the hair of his head was carefully removed, leaving only a tuft. The absence of capilary growth was, however, made up by a profusion of sandal. A long sectarial mark appeared on his forehead, and all the other marks of Brahminism were alike visible in him. His name was Chandrachoorh Tarkalankar. He was devoted, heart and soul, to Sitaram's interest, and lived wherever his pupil lived. At present he had fixed his dwelling in Bhusana. Sitaram had given him a nice house to live in.

Leaving Rama in her own suit of apartments, Sitaram entered the dwelling of his preceptor. With him was he closeted together in a long conference. We need not dwell upon all the particulars of this conversation. Suffice it to say, that Sitaram had nothing, in this world, which he could, in the interest of his own welfare, withhold from the knowledge of Chandrachoorh. He communicated to him both the promises he had made to Sree and to Rama, and said :— "Placed, as I am, between these two dilemmas, I do not see a hole to slip through. Narayan is my only hope. I am not the least inclined to make myself a party to fights and bloodsheds. That's why I've removed Mrinmaya. But I cannot, at the same time, lull myself into the belief, that requests and entreaties will bring about the desired end. However, towards the attainment of this object, I am quite prepared to sacrifice my own life even. Issue depends entirely upon your blessings. In the event of my failure to gain my object,

* Waist cloth made of coarse Berhampore silk.

† A sheet impressed, in red all over, with couplets, composed of the name of *Hari*.

I'll set out on a pilgrimage in the morning. So, here am I, to make my obeisance to you."

Chandrachoorh replied :—"I bless you in season and out of season. Even at this moment my benediction is, that good shall come out of it. Now, then, are you going to call upon the Kazi this very night ?"

Sitaram :—No ; I purpose appearing before him, in proper time to-morrow.

Chandrachoorh Tarkalankar was a man, not to be confounded with the ordinary mass of mankind. He thought :—"This dear chap here has been placed in a fix, I'll be bound. That he has not the slightest inclination to fights and quarrels is only a self-deluding phantasy, on his part. Why, that girl Rukmini is at the root of all evils. But does the girl think, there is no Narad, when there is a Rukmini ? Of what avail can persuasions be, when one has to deal with the Mehamedans ? Will not the Almighty yet suppress the Mehamedans ? How longer are the Hindoos to be ridden rough-shod like this ? Well, let us, once in a way, put the prowess of Sitaram to the test. Are the daily offerings of *toolasi* leaves to Narayana to go for nothing ?"

While thus musing, the Tarkalankar said :—"Your intention to go on a pilgrimage and to send the family for a wash in the Ganges, I regard as a calamity."

Sitaram :—What do you mean ? What's your command ?

Chandra :—I've resolved upon a *yajna**, for your welfare. For the purposes of this, a thousand silver is required. Who is to supply me the wherewith, and who is to make the necessary preparations ?

Sitaram :—I'll get you the money this moment. As for the preparation, tell me whom you want ?

Chandra :—Well, Jiban Bhandari will prove highly dexterous for the preparations, that will have to be made for the purposes of this *yajna*. So get Jiban also. This servant of mine, Ram Sevak, whose duty is to carry my luggages, is very virtuous and trustworthy. Therefore you had better send a letter by him to the cashier to send the silver and Jiban Bhandari.

* A sacrificial rite.

Writing materials were accordingly procured. They consisted of a piece of plantain leaf, and a pen, made out of split bamboo. Sitaram, then, finished a letter, embodying an order on the cashier, for the amount of one thousand rupees and Jiban Bhandari. This letter being entrusted to the care of Ram Sevak, he left instantly. Chandrachoorh then said :—"You may now depart. My benediction is, that good shall be the result." Sitaram, then, made his obeisance to, and separated from, his preceptor.

In a short time, Jiban Bhandari made his appearance before the Tarkalankar with the money and, after he had made his obeisance to the reverend gentleman, the latter said :—"Well, Jiban ! you know the dwelling of everybody in this town, who is your master's tenant or debtor ?

Jiban :—Yes, Sir, every one of them, Sir.

Chandra :—Then, you'll be able to point them out to me to-night I think ?

Jiban :—Oh, certainly, Sir, if you only come along with me ! But at this advanced hour of the night, why should you at all go to their houses, *Chandals* and *Bagdis* that they are ?

Chandra :—Wretch ! what have you to do with that ? Your master never remonstrates with me. Dare you prate ? You'll blindly do my biddings, that's all.

Jiban :—Surely, Sir, surely. Then let us tramp off. Where am I to keep this money ?

Chandra :—Have it with you. Now, if you dare divulge my proceedings of this night, to any living soul, then you'll suffer from collic, and will likewise die of the bites of a jackal.

Now, this Jiban Bhandari stood in profound terror of the disease, as well as of the animal named. He, therefore, ventured to make no further remarks, for fear of drawing the curse of the Brahmin, down upon his own head. Chandrachoorh Tarkalankar, then, took a quantity of flowers, that had already been offered to the deity and, securing them in a corner of the *namabali*, that draped the upper part of his body, he sallied forth, possessed of the silver, and with Jiban Bhandari close at his heels. After achieving a certain distance, Jiban pointed out a hut and said :—"Here are we, in front of the dwelling of one."

Chandra :—"What's the name of this man ?"

" His name is Yudhistir Mandal,"—was Jiban's reply.

Chandrachoorh then enjoined him to call the individual named, and Jiban shouted out ;—"Hillo, ho, Mandal's son !" The man, thus called out, immediately issued from the house and, on his enquiring who 'twas, that wanted him, Chandrachoorh said :—" Well, have you heard, that Gangaram Dass is going to be buried alive to-morrow ?"

Yudhistir replied :—" Yes, I have."

Cnandra :—Will you go to witness it ?

Yudhistir :—'Tis an instance of Mehamedan oppression. What's the good of witnessing it, Sir ?

Chandra :—Yes, but you must go—such is the command of Lakshminarayanji. There, take the cammand.

Thus speaking, the Tarkalankar took one of the flowers from his sheet and handed it over to Yudhistir. Yudhistir touched his head with the flower and said :—" Since such is the command, I must go."

Chandrachoorh again said :—" Methinks you've got weapons ?"

Yudhistir :—Yes, Sir, to a certain extent I have. To preserve master's interest, we have to take to shields and spears at times.

Chandra:—All right. Take them with you—such is the behest of the divinity. Here you are.

And Chandrachoorh took out a silver from the bag, carried by Jiban Bhandari, and gave it to Yudhistir Mandal. The latter took the coin and, conveying it to his head, he said:—" Such being the command of the deity, I can't help taking them with me. But what I was going to ask is—Shall I go alone ?

Chandra :—Whom else do you want to take with you ?

Yudhistir :—Here's Peshad Mandal. He is devilish robust and uncommon dexterous with weapons. I think he, too, should go.

Chandrachoorh then handed a quantity of flowers and silver to Yudhistir and said :—" Take as many as you can."

He then approached another hut with Jiban Bhandari following him. There also he gave away flowers and coins as aforesaid, and, in this way distributing the whole of the thousand rupees, found his way back into his lodging towards the dawn. Such a flame of excitement had been kindled by Sree and Rama that night !

CHAPTER V

In an open and spacious field, on the outskirt of the town of Bhusana, was opened a grave to receive Gangaram. A crowd had already collected long—long before the prisoner was escorted there. At a very early hour in the morning, when yet darkness had not slipped from the protection of the trees, and the stars had not left the shelter of darkness—at such an hour—were flocks of people seen pouring forth from every direction, to witness the burial of a living man. The death (under sentence of a tribunal of justice) of a man is vested with all the pleasures and amusements of a festivity for those who survive, so that, before sunrise, the field was well-nigh filled up. Yet through all the thoroughfares of the town, multitudes of people continued pouring forth incessantly like a train of ants, till, at last, that vast area was insufficient to provide room for the crowd. At one place, sight-seers began to climb the trees and be seated on their branches, like so many apes (as if a little dejected for the want of a tail). At another, another number was found suspended to the trees, like as many bats (as if a little enlivened at the light of the day). Bordering the field, there were a few masonry buildings ; and their roofs, too, were swarming with human forms. Huts outnumbered the buildings; and the thatched roofs of these huts also were called into requisition, so that, with the help of ladders, supporting the feet, people got themselves seated on these thatched tops. The entire area seemed a vast ocean of heads of black hair, crowded and merged into one undiscernible mass of humanity. Incessantly were people wending their way into the field and becoming merged into the crowd—moving, circling, turning and again becoming merged into the mass. Tremendous was the uproar. The spectators, when they saw, that

the prisoner was not yet brought in, lost all patience and began to make noise and confusion—to parley, and exchange blows even. The Hindoos began to abuse the Mehamedans and the *vice versa*. Somebody cried "*Allah!*" others, "*Haribole!*" a third party said :—"It won't take place to-day, so we'd better go back," while the fourth exclaimed :—"There he comes." Those, that were on branches of trees, began, in the absence of any better occupation, to pluck leaves, flowers and fruits as also to break small twigs, and drop them down upon the heads of men, standing below. Others again, not content with these sorts of amusement, began spitting upon them. In this way, there arose great row, round about every tree. There was, however, one tree, about which no such disturbance could be marked. Few were the people, who got themselves posted at the foot of this particular tree. Like a small island in the midst of an ocean, this spot was almost deserted. A couple or two of spectators stood at this spot ; but they created no noise. They appeared like mutes, engaged only in turning out other people, when they sought to avail themselves of this spot. Seeing, that they were very stalwart fellows and likewise armed with long and stout sticks, people quietly shrank back from that point. Standing on the root of this tree and being supported on one of its boughs, a woman only, with upturned countenance, was seen talking to a certain person, seated on one of the branches above. Her eyes and countenance were very much swollen, and her dress, very untidy, as if this woman had wept the whole of the preceding night. But at present she wept not. Addressing the individual on the branch of the tree over-head, this woman said :—"Can anything be observed yet, Reverend Sir ?"

The man, thus addressed, responded—"No."

"Then it seems, that the Almighty hath stepped in to afford protection."

The reader must have seen, that the woman was Sree and the person, to whom she was talking, was Chandrachoorh himself. The branch of a tree was no fit place for him. But perhaps he thought :—"By one, devoted to religion as I am, everything ought to be done, in furtherance of the sacred cause." Leaving his bed at an unusually early hour in the morning, he had issued forth from his house to meet Sree half-way, while going to the place of execution and, on

meeting her as expected, he had voluntarily offered to be her guide. They were known to each other. Why, it may be seen later.

In response to Sree's question, Chandrachoorh said :—"Of course Narayana will afford protection—I think I may safely venture to entertain such a hope, and you need not be alarmed. But as yet, nothing has turned up, that may lead to ultimate security. Presently I see, a number of men, with red turbans on their head, are approaching."

Sree :—What do those red turbans indicate ?

Chandra :—Methinks the army of the Fauzdar.

In fact, two hundred sepoys of the Fauzdari army were found escorting Gangaram. The vast crowd was struck dumb at this sight. Chandrachoorh went on communicating to Sree every particular, as he himself observed from his place on the branch of the tree. Sree asked :—"What's the number of the sepoys ?"

Chandra :—About two hundred.

Sree :—Why such a large number of sepoys has been brought to crush us, who are poor helpless people ?

Chandra :—Perhaps, hearing of the collection of a large number of people, the Fauzdar has sent so many sepoys in way of precaution.

Sree :—What's the next proceeding ?

Chandra :—The sepoys are stationed in a line near the opened grave, Gangaram is behind the sepoys, the Kazi next, and the Fauzdar brings up the rear.

Sree :—What does brother do ?

Chandra :—The wretches have hand-cuffed and chained him.

Sree :—Does he weep ?

Chandra :—No such thing. He is quiet and speechless—his appearance, grave and beautiful.

Sree :—May I not see him once—see him for the last time in this life ?

Chandra :—Yes, yes ; it can be managed. Can you climb this lower branch ?

Sree :—I am a woman, and know not how to climb a tree.

Chandra :—Is this a time to yield to bashfulness, my child ?

Indeed, about a yard above the root, there was a branch, straight as a dart. Instead of shooting off, so as to form an acute angle with

the trunk it ran at a right angle. Having shot off but a few inches, this branch had bifurcated, so that it was rendered perfectly easy to stand on the two offshoots, with the hands, resting on some convenient branch. Chandrachoorh pointed it out to Sree. Sree shook off her bashfulness and attempted to climb the branch. In moments of extreme danger, bashfulness naturally ceases to exercise its influence upon feminine hearts.

Sree's earlier attempts proved unsuccessful, and she began to shed tears. At last, however, by some unknown means—unknown altogether to Sree—she succeeded in clambering the branch and, placing each of her shapely feet on each of the offshoots of the bifurcate branch, she stood with her hand resting on another branch.

This circumstance gave rise to a great hue and cry. There were in front of Sree, no leaves to screen her, from the gaze of the crowd opposite, so that, all on a sudden, the assembled multitude found a woman of unrivalled charms, adorning the spot from amidst the mass of verdant foliage. Her entire form was enframed by branches and leaves of the tree, like the image of a Hindoo divinity. Leaves fell upon her hair, and upon the plump arms. They likewise covered a portion of the hair, that had negligently fallen upon her bosom. One of the branches came up and hid her feet, so that, the congregated crowd could not find out, on what this Goddess of wilderness stood. That section of the multitude, that was the nearest to the spot, where Sree thus appeared, became agitated like an ocean, over the surface of which a storm had swept.

But everything passed quite unnoticed to Sree. Of her own situation, she was totally heedless. She was sreadfastly gazing at Gangaram, and the tears were trickling in torrents from her eyes, when Chandrachoorh exclaimed:—"Look, and, see the person who approaches on horseback yonder!"

Sree turned her eyes to see who it was. In fact, a man, dressed as a warrior, but without weapons, was approaching from another direction. The mare, which the rider bestrode, was highly mettled. Yet, she could not push her way through the crowd. The mare was dancing, rocking, and arching her neck, but could not career onward. Sree saw, it was Sitaram.

Just at this moment, the sepoys were going to throw Gangaram down into the opened grave. Sitaram raised his hand and made a motion to prevent it. The sepoys thereupon desisted. The *Shaha Sahib* said :—" Well, what are you looking at ? Throw the infidel down into the grave !"

The Kazi fell into a reverie. He was not required there at the moment. But hearing of the congregation of an immense multitude, he had come for the sake of his own diversion. Now, however, that he was present on the spot, the management of the affair devolved on him. He said :—" Since Sitaram prevents it, there must be some reason. So we'd better wait till he comes."

The *Shaha Sahib* yielded to the proposal with a very bad grace. A ray of hope now for the first time scintilated in the bosom of Gangaram.

On reaching the spot, where the Kazi stood, Sitaram dismounted from his steed and, first respectfully bowing to the mendicant, did the same in respect to the Kazi. The latter said :—" Well, then, *Roy Sahib*, you are all right in health ?"

Sitaram replied :—" *Alhum-dal-il-lah* !" (praise be unto God.) As regards health, I'll be charmed to hear of your welfare in that respect, insignificant a wight as I am."

The Kazi said :—" As it has pleased Heaven to keep this slave of His ! Now it remains for this age—this grey hair—to reach the grave. But is every thing getting on well in that seat of treasure of yours ?"

Sitaram's reply was :—" Enjoying, as I do, the good wishes of a propitious personage like yourself, where is the possibility of anything being amiss in that abode of poverty ?"

The Kazi questioned :—" Now, then, what brings you here ?"

Sitaram replied :—This Gangaram, a child of misfortune and destitute of the power of distinction though he is, is of my own caste. In sympathy, therefore, I've made my appearance before you. Let an order be passed for the grant of his life."

The Kazi said :—" Is it ever possible ?"

Sitaram replied :—" A propitious personage and one, who can appreciate merits, can do everything."

The Kazi observed :—" The matter has passed into the keeping of the Almighty. Nothing can now be expected from me."

Sitaram rejoined :—"He shall pay a fine of one thousand *ashruphis*.* Let an order be issued granting him life."

The Kazi turned towards the Faquir. But he nodded a dissent.

The Kazi then said :—" The proposal can't be accepted." Then turning towards the sepoys he said :—" Cast the infidel into the gulf."

Sitaram observed :—" I will pay two thousand *ashruphis*. Here am I uniting the palms of my hands. Do it for my sake, I pray."

The Kazi again turned to the Faquir. But again he rejected the proposal, and it was scattered to the winds. Sitaram then offered four thousand, then five thousand, then eight, and at last ten thousand. But nothing was accepted by the mendicant. Sitaram had got no more. He now sank upon his knees and, with joined hands, said in a distressed tone :—" I have got no more in ready money. But whatever else I have got, such as my *talooks* and lands, lease-holds and free-holds, estates and possessions, in short, every thing, that I may call my own, I am prepared to give up. Accept them and, in return, let him off.

The Kazi asked :—" How nearly and dearly may he be related to you, that you are giving up every thing for him ?"

Sitaram replied :—" Never mind the relation. I am pledged to his safety, and will ensure it, even at the sacrifice of everything I own. This is one of the doctrines of our Hindoo religion."

The Kazi observed :—" Whatever may be the tenets of your Hindoo religion, Mahamedan religion is superior to it. This man has insulted one of the members of our mendicant fraternity, and his life must be forfeited. There's no doubt of that. For a crime like this, there's no other punishment than the forfeiture of the infidel's life."

Upon hearing this, Sitaram again fell upon his knees and, taking the skirts of the Kazi's flowing garb into his own hand, he said, in a voice, choked for tears :—" Oh ! 'tis the life of an infidel that you want—don't you? I am also an infidel. Cannot this crime be expiated by the forfeiture of *my* life ? Here do I get down into the grave ; throw earth upon me, and, with the name of *Hari* on my

* The gold coin of the period, equal in value to about 22 rupees of the present time.

lips, shall I go to heaven. I beseech you, O Kazi *Sahib*, to forfeit my life and, in return, grant the life of this poor man! He, whom you call your *Allah*, is identical with my Lord of Paradise. Act righteously. I am prepared to give up my life; in return, grant the life of this insignificant being."

Those of the spectators, that were Hindoos, and upon whose ears the above colloquy fell, began to shout out, in an exuberance of glee, the name of *Hari*, and, amidst a roar of clappings, cried out:—"Truly noble art thou, O *Roy Sahib*! Success wait upon thee, O Kazi! let the poor fellow off!"

To these exclamations others also were joined, so that, there arose a great tumult. The Kazi was really very much amazed. He said:—"Good Heavens, *Roy Sahib*, you know not what you say! Who is this man to you, that you are going to immolate your own life to save his?"

Sitaram replied:—"This man is dearer to me than my brother—than my offspring—in as much as he has taken refuge, in my intercession on his own behalf. The tenets of the Hindoo religion teach us, that a man, in a kindred situation, is to be saved even at the cost of one's own existence. King Wausinar* cut off all the flesh of his body to save a dove, So, please, sacrifice me and let him off."

The Kazi could not help being somewhat pleased with Sitaram. He then took the Faquir aside and spoke to him in whispers:—"This gentleman offers ten thousand *ashruphis*. The amount will be a god-send to the public coffers. What sayest thou to taking the gold and letting the wretch go?"

The Faquir replied:—"I would rather throw them both into the same grave. What say you to that?

The Kazi said:—"Just Heavens! that can't be. Sitaram has committed no offence. Besides, he is a man of respect, social position and good character. That can't be."

Till this instant Gangaram remained speechless—he knew it for

* It is stated in the *Mahabharat* that, hunted by a fowler, a dove flew into the lap of King Wausinar. The fowler, in pursuit of the dove, met the King and demanded the dove. On the King refusing to make it over to the fowler, the latter said, he could only accede to the King's wish, on condition of his giving flesh, out of his own body, equal in weight to that of the dove. To this the King cheerfully agreed and suffered his flesh to be cut off.

certain, nothing could save him. But observing the whispered conversation between the Kazi and the mendicant, he now addressed the former, and, with united palms of his hands, said :—"I can't exactly say, what will be the pleasure of the propitious. But in the matter of the proposal for saving the life of this poor man, I think he has a certain claim upon the audience of the propitious. Now, then, where is the law, which sanctions the forfeiture of one's life on account of the offence of another ? I do not want to live, if to secure me my life it costs Sitaram his own. Sooner I would dash out my brains with these hand-cuffs."

A voice was now heard speaking from the thickest of the crowd :—"Better dash your brains out with the hand-cuffs : you'll avoid death at the hands of the Mahamedans."

The speaker was Chandrachoorh himself. He was no longer seated on the branch of the tree. Hearing him speak thus, one of the sepoys cried :—"Arrest him, arrest him." It was, however, very difficult to arrest Chandrachoorh Tarkalankar. The task remained unaccomplished.

On the other hand, at the suggestion of dashing out the brains with the hand-cuffs, the Faquir grew alarmed, lest he should have been deprived of the pleasant satisfaction of getting a man buried alive at his own instance. He, therefore, said to the Kazi :—"What's the good of hand-cuffing him any longer ? Just get the irons removed."

Accordingly the Kazi gave the necessary order, and the blacksmith took the hand-cuffs off Gangaram's wrists. It was not absolutely necessary, for the purposes of the execution, for the blacksmith to be present at the scene. But, then, he was the custodian of public hand-cuffs and chains. This was the ostensible reason to account for his presence on the spot. But the real, though the covert, reason was, that the worthy blacksmith had been bribed overnight by Chandrachoorh Tarkalankar. The Faquir then cried :—"Why any more delay ? Bid him be buried."

The blacksmith now stepped in and said—"Are the chains to be left on his legs ? Wherefore allow the loss of public chains ? Now-a-days good iron has become very rare, and the number of bad characters has so much increased, that I feel myself insufficient for the task of supplying chains."

Accordingly, at the order of the Kazi, the chains also were taken

off. Thus disentangled, Gangaram swept his eyes around. He then performed something, bordering upon a miracle. Sitaram was standing close, with his riding whip in his hand. All unawares, Gangaram wrested the whip from Sitaram's hand, and vaulting upon the back of the mare, he gave her a smart stripe with the whip. The mettled palfrey was almost maddened at the lash. One bound forward, and she cleared the yawning gulf of the grave, trod upon a number of sepoys, and, in a twinkling of the eye, disappeared in the thickest of the crowd.

All these things took place within the time in which the lightning flashes. The congregated multitude again shouted out. The sepoys ran after the mare, crying "arrest him, arrest him." But this led to the confusion being more confounded still. Of the way of the spirited mare, everybody got out in fear, so that, Gangaram's onward progress was by no means impeded, whereas the sepoys could not make way for themselves through the crowd, which, as soon as the mare passed, became as impervious as ever. They then attempted to clear their way, with the help of weapons. But to their utter dismay they found, that at this moment a number of strong men, armed with shields and spears, were elbowing their way through the crowd, like so many personifications of Death, to confront them. Then a re-inforcement of sepoys was procured. The Hindoos, too, strengthened themselves by adding to their number and opposed the Mahamedans. Thus there took place a great affray between the Hindoos and the Mahamedans.

This state of affairs greatly irritated the Kazi, and he asked Sitaram :—" Well, what does it mean?"

Sitaram answered :—" I cannot understand it.

The Kazi retorted :—" You can't understand it, but I can ; these are all your freaks."

Sitaram :—Why, then, should I have come to give up my life?

The Kazi :—Well, presently I'll grant that prayer of yours. *You* shall be consigned to that grave now.

Thus speaking, the Kazi ordered the blacksmith to hand-cuff and chain Sitaram. Another man was despatched to the Fauzdar to procure his presence at the scene of the occurrence with a fresh re-inforcement of sepoys. Standing on the tree like the Goddess of

wilderness, Sree perceived all these things. She marked the arrest of Sitaram. She observed hand-cuffs being put on his wrists by the blacksmith. She likewise saw, that a man was despatched to the Fauzdar.

With difficulty, though without molestation, did Gangaram emerge from the crowd, mounted on the back of the mare. During his progress on horse-back, he heard a tremendous uproar amongst the assembled people. The tumult was waxing warmer every moment. Knots and knots of people were rushing onward, and the mare, frightened at this, became quite unmanageable. Gangaram was by no means an accomplished rider. And he was so much occupied with managing the courser, that he could not turn his attention to what was going on around. Only the sound of "kill them," "kill them" reached his ears.

At last, somehow or other, he succeeded in issuing forth from the crowd with his mare. He then let the animal off and, with a view to seeing what was going on, mounted the top of a banian tree. He saw, there was a great confusion. That large crowd was divided into two sections. One part was composed solely of Hindoos, and the other, of Mahamedans. The latter were led by a number of sepoys, while the former had a number of men, armed with shields and spears, in their front. The Hindoos were very robust. They outnumbered the Mahamedans. The latter were being beaten by the former and were running away, pursued by their antagonists, who cried "kill them," "kill them."

With these sounds, the entire neighbourhood resounded. Everybody, whether engaged in the fight or not, had the words on his lips. Gangaram saw, that the Hindoos were running in every direction. His astonishment exceeded all bounds when, along with the cries of "kill them, kill them," the exclamations of "victory be unto the Goddess Chandi," "Mother Chandi hath appeared," "'tis the command of Chandi"—"kill them" were alike wafted up to his ears.

Gangaram wondered what could be the meaning of all these. Casting his glances around, he, however, saw, that half-concealed in the mass of verdant foliage of the spreading tree, was standing a form, resembling the image of Chandi. Each of her shapely feet was placed on each of the offshoots of a bifurcate branch, and holding,

with her left hand, another pliant twig, with her right, was she whirling the end of her winding-sheet and crying "kill them," "kill them," "kill the enemies." The end of the wrap went on whirling. The wind was playing with the uncovered mass of her disordered hair. Under the pressure of her proud feet, the bifurcate branch was rocking, being swayed upwards and downwards, and, along with it, her person of delicious charms was likewise rising and sinking. She appeared like the Goddess Durga, dancing upon the back of the lion, in the excitement of war. She appeared like the Goddess, when, occupied in the all-absorbing engagement of extirpating the *Asuras*, she had exclaimed :—"Kill, kill, kill the enemies." Sree was no longer bashful. The conciousness of external objects seemed to have abandoned her altogether. Incessantly was she crying :—"Kill, kill, kill the enemies—enemies of the Gods—enemies of men—enemies of the Hindoos—enemies of myself; kill them." Her arms, how beautiful were they! were upraised. Her nether lip wreathed, her nostrils dilated, her eyes flashed. On her perspiring forehead, how charming appeared the stray tresses, bathed, as they were, in the sweat. The Hindoos were gazing intently upon her, and, with the exclamation of "success be unto the Goddess Chandi" on their lips, were precipitating into the fight. At first Gangaram took her to be Chandi herself. To his surprise, however, he soon discovered 'twas Sree.

Impelled to action at the appearance of this Chandi, the Hindoos won the battle. Inspired as they seemed, with *her* prowess, the Mahamedans could not cope with their force, and they were dispersed on all sides, so that, in a short time, the battle-field was totally cleared of them. Gangaram now saw, that a tall, well-built man was carrying Sitaram on his shoulders, and, surrounded by others, the latter brought him over to the spot, where Sree stood. He moreover saw, that another armed Hindoo was carrying the severed head of the *Shaha Sahib* on the point of his spear held high in the air. At this moment Sree's senses abandoned her and, dislodged from her place on the branch of the tree, she fell down. Gangaram now dismounted from the tree.

CHAPTER VI

A rumour now got afloat, that with cannons and bayonets, balls and bullets, the Fauzdar was marching in person, for the suppression of the rebels. Of what avail, then, could shields and spears be, in opposition to balls and bullets? And the whole army of those strong and robust people disappeared in a moment. Men, who had never wielded a weapon, but who, under the guidance of the armed ones, had been creating quite a noise with their self-praises for the so-called winning of the battle, now turned round and said :—"We have been deprecating such a course all along," and without casting another glance behind, precipitated homewards at a break-neck rate. Those also, who did not mix themselves up in the affray, now, anticipating the probability of "a good cow being tethered along with a vicious one," began to throw heaps upon heaps of abuses upon Sitaram and Gangaram and, with utterances expressive of the highly distressed feelings of their heart on their lips, fled away, so that, quick as the gun-powder explodes after the match has been applied to it, that immense crowd vanished altogether. The field now became as deserted as ever. Of its human occupants, there were only Chandrachoorh, and Sitaram, and Gangaram, and that senseless Sree, lying prostrate at the foot of the tree.

Sitaram said to Gangaram:—"Well, what have you done with my horse, that you stole away? Have you sold it and self-appropriated the proceeds?"

Gangaram smiled and replied :—"No, Sir; I have let the horse loose in the fields, and am prepared to catch it."

Sitaram added :—"Then catch it, and get yourself borne on its back once again."

Gangaram :—Leaving you ?

Sitaram :—Give yourself no fidget on account of your sister.

Gangaram :—I'll not leave you.

Sitaram :—You just cross the greater river ; you know Shyampore ?

Gangaram :—Oh, yes ! Of course I do.

Sitaram :—Hasten thither and you'll meet me there ; or, depend upon it, nothing will save you.

Gangaram :—I'll not budge an inch from your company.

Sitaram frowned at Gangaram and said :—"I'll now call upon the Fauzdar. Will you accompany me thither ?

Rather in consequence of Sitaram's frown than of what he said, Gangaram remained silent. At last when he saw, that Sitaram was really displeased with him, he went away in quest of the horse.

While the abovementioned conversation was taking place in one quarter, in another was Chandrachoorh performing a certain operation upon Sree, which, in refined language, is known by the appellation of *mesmerism*. After some time, either in consequence of Chandrachoorh's operation, or naturally, Sree regained her senses and, slowly rising to a sitting posture, she drew her veil. Then, casting her glances around, she rose and, without speaking to anybody, slowly made for the town.

After she had gone a little way, Sitaram said to Chandrachoorh :—"You, Sir, follow her, and make arrangements for her safety. No further direction is needed for you ?"

Chandrachoorh asked :—"What would you do now ?"

Sitaram :—On that point I am yet undecided. 'Tis for you to go to Shyampore. There, if alive, shall I meet you.

Chandrachoorh was very much anguished. And bidding adieu to Sitaram he followed Sree. The preceptor and the pupil thoroughly understood each other. Chandrachoorh, therefore, could not raise his voice against what Sitaram said to him.

Everybody now left the field ; and it would have been totally abandoned, but for the presence of Sitaram—Sitaram alone—nailed to the spot near the foot of the tree, from the protection of which Sree, as the image of the Goddess Chandi, had won the battle, his hand

resting on the same branch. To all of us such times present themselves, by the occurrence of a moment of which the whole of the future existence is controlled. Such, indeed, was now the case with Sitaram. He thought:—"What is the occurrence?" "What has given rise to it?" "Who has brought it about?" "Will it result in ultimate good?" "What does it signify?"

On whatsoever direction Sitaram turned his mental vision, he could perceive nothing but the

Tyranny of the Mahamedan Sway.

The history of *Surs* and *Asurs* flashed in his memory:—"Who 'twas, that extirpated Britra, Sambara, Tripura Soonda, Upasoonda, Vali, Prahlada and Verochana?" "Wherefore were they disposed of?" "Why were they made?" "And why again done away with?"

Then he thought of the *Rakshases* and of men:—"Who killed Ravan, Kumbhakarna, Indrajeet, Alambush, Hidimba, Vak, Ghatotkach, Dantabakra, Sisupal, Ekalabya, Duryodhan, Kangsha and Jarasandha?" "Wherefore were they killed?" "Why it was that Nahusha was metamorphosed into a huge snake?"

He then concluded—as the essence wafted up by that uncontrollable flow of reflection he got—Deva, which meant,—Divine Justice.

Sitaram was then seized upon by the idea of something highly momentous. Like a feeble, luminous streak, floating before the eyes even when they have been closed in the midst of gazing at a light,—at first seeming a delusion, but then striking upon the senses as not being a delusion, but a light indeed,—a feeble light did Sitaram perceive. Then as a bit of fire, on a mass of leaves fallen off from the trees in a forest, at first appears to be feeble like the light of a fire-fly—very feeble, yet a light—to Sitaram it appeared such a light. Oh, how delicious is a light in the mind! 'Tis paradise. Or even paradise itself dwindles into insignificance in comparison to it. He, who has, once in his life, felt a light in his mind, never forgets it. Genius is the quintessence of worldly bliss. 'Tis genius, which shows the Imperishable Being.

A light, resembling that of a fire-fly, Sitaram felt in his bosom. As a little spark of fire, like that of a fire-fly, set on a mass of dry

leaves in a forest, gradually spreads, gradually burns, so Sitaram felt to be the case in his own bosom. He perceived, that by degrees greater quantities of dry leaves caught the fire—by degrees the dark forest became more and more lighted—by degrees the dark foliage began to lose their darkness and send forth a bright verdant radiance. On flowers and fruits, on leaves and creepers, on boughs and trunks, a blazing light began to tremble. Gradually it became a tremendous blaze, till at last it became a conflagration—everything was alight—it was the appearance of a hundred suns! Sitaram saw, what that mental light was. He saw, that the sun, which had thus suddenly appeared on his mental sky was called :—

The establishment of a just Government.

He likewise saw, that

That sun would disperse all darkness.

This conviction deprived Sitaram of the calmness of his temper. Who ever had succeeded in maintaining an equanimity with genius in his bosom? In the first paroxysm of this excitement, he threw up his arm and said :—"This arm of mine! Is it destitute of strength? Who can wield a sword as I do? Whose fist is so very forcible? Does not this tongue of mine enjoy the favour of the Muses? Who can captivate popular mind as I? Do I not know policies?"

All on a sudden Sitaram was struck by the lightning, as it were. His mental light went out in a moment. He thought :—"What am I talking? Am I demented? What am I doing? Who am I? What am I? I am merely a little ant—a grain of sand on the beach. So much vanity in me? Is this the wisdom which instigates me to think of empires? Fie to human wisdom!"

Sitaram devoted himself, heart and soul, to the contemplation of the Almighty. He now began to contemplate Him, Who was Eternal and Everlasting, Who was the Origin of the entire creation, the Vitality in mortals, the Inducer of worldly deeds, with Whom rested the settlement of all issues arising out of mortal actions, and Who was the Ruler of all sorts of destinies. He also fell to the meditation of His purity, glory and eternity. He now saw, that He was Power,

He was Prowess, He was Justice. He likewise saw, that power without justice was ultimate weakness. He further saw, that

Just itself was the origin of a just Government.

Sitaram's mind now became affectionate, and contented, and calm. Casting his eyes, Sitaram saw, that the field was swarming with troops.

CHAPTER VII

The news of the flight of the rebels had reached the Fauzdar before the Mahamedan army issued forth. It was not therefore for the purposes of a battle, but for the arrest of those, concerned in the affray, that the troops now came. But seeing nobody in the field, they began to disperse, some towards the villages and the others, towards the town. One of the troopers came up to the spot where Sitaram stood rivetted and said :—"Well, who art thou?"

Sitaram :—A man.

The trooper :—Quite so, but what's thy name?

Sitaram :—What business have you to know my name?

The soldier :—Art thou a bad character?

Sitaram :—May be.

The soldier :—Art thou a vagrant?

Sitaram :—Possibly.

The soldier :—Thou art a robber.

Sitaram :—What do I seem?

The trooper :—Thou mayst be a thief.

Sitaram :—Greater than the Emperor of Delhi?

The soldier :—What sayst thou?

Sitaram :—I say why do you molest me?

The soldier :—Well, I'll arrest thee.

Sitaram :—No objection.

The soldier :—Now, then, move on.

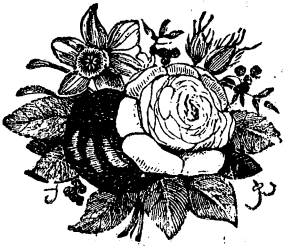
Sitaram :—Whither am I to go?

The soldier :—Into the prison.

Sitaram :—Lead the way, then. But you are on horse-back. How am I to keep pace with you—I who have to walk?

The sepoy :—Well, trot up.

The trooper accordingly began to "trot up," Sitaram following him. On the way, the soldier met one of the *paiks*; and, accosting him, he said :—"This man is a thief. So conduct him to the *Jamadar* of the jail.



CHAPTER VIII

Without any sort of molestation Chandrachoorh escorted Sree up to the town. He, then, took her to an isolated little house and said .—"Come, my dear child,—there's an image of the Goddess Kali here,—She is always awake,*—let's make our obeisance to her! She'll bless you."

Accordingly Sree entered the house and found it to be very secluded. In one of the rooms, there stood the image of the goddess, half concealed in flowers, sandal-juice and the leaves of *Vilva.*† The human occupant of the room was only a woman, on the bleak side of eighty. This woman now addressed Chandrachoorh and said :—"Is that you, Father Tarka ?"

Chandrachoorh replied :—"Well, my good woman ! how is the worship of Mother Kali going on ?"

Now, this woman of four score years of age was of impaired auricular powers. She seemed to have heard "how is the son of your sister doing ?" She, therefore, replied :—"The fever has not left yet. Moreover, diarrhœa has set in. His safety now rests with Mother Kali !"

From this short colloquy Sree saw, that the crone was desperately deaf. Chandrachoorh now said to Sree :—"For the present you reside with his woman. Then, when Gangaram has become a little secure, I'll conduct you to him. Or, how dare you live in your own house, now that so much is apprehended from the Mahamedans ?"

Sree :—How longer, Sir, are these oppressions of the Mahamedans

---

* It is generally believed, that most of the gods and goddesses of the Hindoo pantheon have gone to sleep in this *Kali Yug.* Only a few are awake.

† A kind of fruit tree, the leaves of which are said to be pleasing to Siva and Sakti.

to continue? Is there nothing, bearing upon the point, in the Sastras?

Chandra :—Nothing of the sort, my child! 'Tis not a matter for the Sastras, but for the physical power of the Hindoos, to deal with.

Sree :—Where's the want, Sir! of physical power amongst the Hindoos? You've marked the reverse just now!

And the entire form of Sree dilated like that of a puffed up lioness.

Chandra :—Whatever, my child! I have seen to-day, is your prowess. Shall we live to see another instance of it?

The puffed up lioness now drooped her head in modesty. Then, raising her countenance, she said :—"Wherefore are the Hindoos so much wanting in physical force? Many are talked of as being very powerful!"

The sharp-witted Chandrachoorh scanned Sree from tip to top, unperceived by her. He said unto himself :—"Good, my dear girl, good! You are a child just after my choice. That's what I, too, was thinking of."

Then addressing Sree, he said :—"Not that there's nobody powerful enough amongst the Hindoos. There are such, to be sure. But, then, they expect favours from the Mahamedans. For instance, look at Sitaram! What can't be done by Sitaram? But he is loyal to the backbone, and is one of the recipients of Imperial favours. Without sufficient reason, therefore, he will never prove rebellious. As a matter of course, who espouses the cause of religion?"

Sree :—But is there no such reason?

And again did she droop her head. After remaining silent for a while, she resumed :—"I am a woman—a weak woman. I know not wherefore I am talking to you in this strain. 'Tis possible, that the bereavement, consequent on the death of a parent, and the grief, for the sufferings of a brother, have deprived my mind of its natural healthy tone, and I have become like one demented."

But Chandrachoorh did not care for such an explanation, and he did not listen to it. He said :—"Well, up to this moment no such reason has presented itself. I cannot say, what may be the result, if any such reason ever occurs. But one thing is sure, and that is, that so long as Sitaram does not directly suffer from Mahamedan tyranny,

he will not be led to commit the sin of unfurling the banner of rebellion against his sovereign."

Sree shut herself up into a profound musing. Chandrachoorh went on gazing steadfastly upon her countenance, like a *chatak*,* gazing wistfully on the clouds. He saw, Sree was totally absorbed in her own reflection. She seemed deprived of her senses. He, therefore, said :—"Now, then, my dear child, you stay here for the present ! I am going away."

Sree, however, vouchsafed no reply. It did not even seem, that the words, uttered by Chandrachoorh, had fallen upon her ears. Chandrachoorh awaited a reply. He was perfectly acquainted with all the phases of genius—whether clear or eclipsed, tranquil or agitated. In expectation, therefore, of getting an answer, he remained still, with his optics, fixed on Sree's countenance. At last he saw, that Sree had become perfectly collected—her countenance smiling—her eyes luminous. Chandrachoorh concluded :—"Presently the clouds will pour down a shower, and the *chatak's* thirst will be slaked."

Sree drew her veil a little and, with a smile, playing upon her lips, she said :—"Is it not practicable, Sir, to stroll into the field at this hour ?"

Chandra :—Why ? It would be a great risk—the sepoys are stalking on all sides !

Sree :—Yes, but I must go. Becacuse I have lost a certain article there. You may, if you like, remain here, while I go alone.

Chandra :—Well, am I not possessed of that amount of courage which *you* have ? Come, I'll accompany you."

Sree then led the way into the field. A large number of soldiers—cavalry as well as infantry—was in search of the rebels. One of them advanced and, catching hold of Chandrachoorh, said :—"Now, then, who art thou ?"

Chandra :—You see I am a priestly Brahmin. There's a *parban's shrad* † in the house of one of my clients. So, I'm going

---

* A kind of birds, resembling the sky-lark. It is believd, that these birds drink of no other water than drops of rain, falling down from the clouds.

† Oblations given to departed ancestors on the day of the *Mahalaya*.

to another village. You've simply to tell me what is required of me, and 'twill be done in no time.

The soldier :—All right, you may depart. Only tell me, how this woman here stands related to you.

Chandra :—No, my good man, she is not at all related to me !

Thus speaking, Chandrachoorh shrank a few paces from Sree. He knew, he was to be guided by *her* wit at the moment. The soldier then asked Sree :—" Well, tell me who you are and go home. We are not authorized to arrest females save one, and that one we are in search of."

Sree :—Oh, you allude to the one, who so much distressed you from her place on the branch of the tree yonder, don't you ?

The soldier :—Yes, yes. They call her Chandi.

Sree :—Never mind what they call her. But I am that wretched woman.

The soldier's flesh crept, and he said :—" Well, what say you ?"

Sree :—I say, that I am that unfortunate female.

The soldier :—My God ! don't you say so, my lady ! You better go home.

Sree :—May the gods bless you—I am going home.

Just at this moment, another soldier came up to the spot and said :—" I say, why do you arrest the woman ?"

The first soldier was placed in a cruel fix. He saw, that if his comrade drew the woman into conversation, and if, in the course of the colloquy, the woman admitted the fact, then he would be placed in a difficulty. Perhaps it would result in his being called upon to enter upon his defence, for letting off the chief rebel. The kind-hearted soldier accordingly said in reply to his companion's query :—" Well, this is the woman we all want !"

The second soldier exclaimed :—"*Allah Akbar* !* Come, come, let's lead her on into the presence of the *Huzur*, and both of us will be amply rewarded !"

The first sepoy replied :—" You better escort her, brother ! I've got something to attend to elsewhere."

The fire-eater, to whom the above was addressed, was mightily

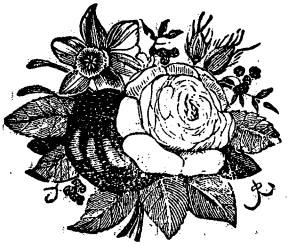
* God is great.

pleased. He pushed Sree onward. The first trooper stood very much grieved at heart. Let us give each of the two soldiers a name. The first was called Khyar Ali, while the name of the second was Pir Bux.

Hurled onward by the soldier's push, Sree smiled and, addressing Chandrachoorh, she said aloud :—

"Sir! should you happen to know my husband, tell him, that he is in duty bound to rescue me."

The tears now tickled in quick succession down Chandrachoorh's cheeks and, weeping, he said :—"Truly admirable art thou, my child!"



CHAPTER IX

The soldiers now began to bring in flocks and flocks of rebels under arrest. People, actually concerned in the affray, were enjoying the sport from the security of their own dwellings, so that those, that now fell into the clutches of the sepoys, were mostly innocent. The soldiers were required to make arrests, and they began to arrest everybody, who came in their way. The culprits took the necessary precaution and, therefore, could not be found out. Innocent people did not deem it necessary to be cautious, and they were accordingly taken into custody. Somebody was dumb-founded at the sight of a sepoy, and was gazing at him. He was, therefore, arrested as being very daring. Another fled affrighted at the appearance of a trooper. He too, was taken into charge on the ground, that the fugitives are generally the delinquents. Somebody gave prompt replies to the questions put by the sepoys, and was apprehended as a knave and bad character. Others, who could not vouchsafe similar answers, were alike taken into custody—the guilty become naturally silent. To arrest the weak there was no trouble, and the good-natured soldier, out of mercy, arrested them. The strong were presumably the members of the affray and, as such, were taken into charge. Poverty begets crime, and this led to the apprehension of the poor. It was likely, that the wealthy people had hired men for the purposes of the scuffle, and they were, therefore, arrested. The sepoys were required to arrest one woman—the one, who, from above the tree, had incited the mob, with her cries of "kill them, kill them," to rush into the fight ; and they brought hundreds, in the place of one under arrest. Those of

the soldiers, that had heard that the woman wanted was a widow, arrested every widow who came across them. Those again, who were told, that the female to be apprehended was handsome, arrested every handsome woman. The sepoys, who had understood, that the woman in question was young, at once secured and caressed every youthful charmer whom they met. Others again, who had heard, that the woman, who had stood on the tree, had got her hair dishevelled, began to bring, into the presence of the authorities, every female, who suffered her hair to descend flowing down her back.

In this way was the criminal jail overstocked with prisoners of both sexes and, there being no more room, the prison was closed for the day. Thus secured, the prisoners were left to await whatever order, consistent with their respective destinies, might be passed on them in the morning. Along with others, Sitaram also was thrown into it and secured alike.

Sitaram was generally known amongst the authorities. Had he chosen, he might have got an interview with the Fauzdar, or might have had such arrangements made as would have obviated the necessity of his remaining pell-mell with the mob. But he attempted nothing of the sort. On the contrary, if he saw, that anybody had recognized him, he made some sign to the indivdual, who had thus recognized him, to keep his own counsel, as to his identity. He said unto himself ;—"If I leave these people to shift for themselves as best they can, nothing will lead to their ultimate release."

Night came on, and the janitors of the prison secured the only door, with which it was provided, from outside, and mounted guard upon the inmates.

Nobody had anything to eat. Immediately after nightfall, the prisoners began to stretch out their own wraps and lie down upon them. Sitaram now took the opportunity to approach them one by one. Then addressing them, he said ;—"Don't fall asleep, as you value your safety."

The words fell upon the ears of the affrighted prisoners ; but none could catch their import. However, they ventured not to question him, nor did any one suffer sleep to deprive himself of his consciousness. Or, affrighted and hungry as they were, slumber was not to be thought of. The first third hour of the night was proclaimed by the

nahabatwallah,* who, having treated the prisoners to a splendid outpour of instrumental melody in *Jhijhitkhambaz* † left his place in quest of meal. At this time, Sitaram was listening to the lamentations of a number of prisoners, gathered in a certain part of the prison. When they concluded, he said :—"Well, my good people! what's the use of bewailing and lamenting like that? We can escape this moment, if we simply will it!"

One of the men, thus addressed, said :—"How can we escape?"

Sitaram replied :—"Why? Can we not break this door open?"

Another of the party said :—"Are you mad?"

Sitaram asked ;—"Why, my good fellow? Do tell me what is our number here?"

One of the men replied ;—"Of that, about five or six hundred,"

Sitaram, then, questioned :—"Do you think five or six hundred men insufficient to break a door open?"

This excited a laughter amongst the inmates of the prison. One of them said ;—"Don't you see, that the gate is of iron?"

Sitaram replied ;—"You do not mean to say, that man is made of sugar-candy or of clay?"

Another of the men then said :—"Yet an iron gate cannot be broken with the hands, nor cut with the teeth, nor yet torn with the finger-nails!"

Sitaram observed ;—"But cannot the kicks of five hundred men break a gate? United efforts can succeed in breaking a mountain—bridging a sea. Haven't you heard of the spanning of the sea by squirrels?"

Hearing him speak thus, one of the prisoners said :—"Well, after all, the man speaks well!"

Then addressing Sitaram, the man said :—"Yes, my dear fellow, take for granted, that we succeed in breaking open the gate! But what of the sepoys outside?"

Sitaram questioned :—"Well, how many sepoys are there?"

---

* *Nahabat* is a kind of concert, intended to be heard from a distance, and, as such, is placed on a loft, somewhere about the outer part of the mansion of wealthy people. It generally consists of a reed instrument like a clarionet, drums and a pair of cymbals.

† One of the tunes with which native music is noted.

The man replied :—" Say a couple or two."

Sitaram again asked :—" Will not five hundred of us be able to kill four or five ?"

Another man retorted :—" But of what avail will our teeth and nails prove in opposition to men, who are provided with weapons ?"

" Then *I*'ll provide you with weapons," was Sitaram's response.

The man asked :—" You ? Where will *you* get weapons ?"

Sitaram replied :—" I am Sitaram Roy."

At this announcement, men, who were bandying words with Sitaram, were staggered ; and they slank away to some distance. One of them said :—" We see, 'tis for our deliverance, that thou hast found thy way into this prison, and I, for one, will obey thee blindly."

This view was adopted by every one of the inmates of the prison, with whom Sitaram was conversing. He, then, sought another body of prisoners and began to talk to them in precisely the same strain. The result was, that they, too, guaranteed their obedience and volunteered their assistance. Thus did Sitaram not only cheer the drooping spirits of the prisoners, but by his extraordinary talent, able policy, and unrivalled forensic ability, he instigated them to lay down their lives even.

He now asked the whole body of prisoners to stand. They obeyed. He then formed them into lines—the first line facing the door, another next, the third behind the second, and so on. He then caused each line to consist of three individuals and made them take their place in such a way, that one from behind could easily pass between the two in front, without the slightest disorder.

These arrangements occupied Sitaram till the close of another third hour. With the sound, " *dagara nagara garagari*," the drum said various unintelligible things and, to its accompaniment, the delicious note of *Behag* rendered the night still, personified and horrible. Sitaram saw, it was the proper time. Except the sepoys on duty, all others had fallen asleep. The authorities, too, were enjoying the repose of slumber. He then said to the three men, forming the line immediately facing the door ;—" Just kick at the door with all your might. You'll kick only thrice and then move back. But take care, that all the three kicks are administered

simultaneously. Or else, everything is lost. Because there is space enough in these panels for three feet, I have formed the lines to consist of three individuals each. Kick then, and shout out :—'Victory to Luckshminarayanji.'"

The captives seemed to have comprehended it; and, with the exclamation of 'victory to Luckshminarayanji' on their lips, they simultaneously kicked at the iron gate.

Outside the prison gate, four janitors were dozing away their time of watch. A sound, resembling a thunder-clap, startled them. But not able to ascertain what the din was, nor whence did it emanate, they began to cast their searching glances around.

Inside the prison, no sooner was the first three simultaneous kicks dealt on the door, than the men, dealing them, stepped back; and the three, composing the next line, took their station and followed suit. Much as kicks were ineffectual in breaking the iron gate, they, however, produced a tremendous din; and one of the warders on watch vociferated to the captives :—"Now, then, what does the noise mean?"

But the only response which the question evoked was, 'Victory to Luckshminaraynji', shouted out by the prisoners inside.

The second sepoy said :—"Methinks the fellows want to break the gate open."

The third warder retorted :—"Let'em do so. Only think of the natives of Bengal, breaking an iron gate!"

The fourth sentinel added :—"Come come; let'em have their own way. A few minutes more, and their energy will fail them."

But this colloquy did not reach the ears of the captives. Because, like the continuous roll of thunder during a heavy storm, were kicks now dealt on the iron gate, producing a tremendous noise, in which every other sound was drowned. The captives were very much excited. Yet Sitaram did not allow them to push themselves beyond the sphere of patience. He kept them each in his assigned post, so that, there was marked no confusion or disorder within the prison-walls.

At first the sepoys on watch were enjoying the fun. They did not imagine, that the prisoners were in right earnest, and thought they would soon desist. However, they soon became convinced of

the fact. They saw, that the prisoners gradually grew more and more energetic as well as strong. They now deemed it absolutely necessary to chastise them. Three of them came to the agreement, that they would unfasten the gate, get inside the prison, and, belaboring the captives to their heart's content, would come out.

Yes. Three of the janitors were unanimous. Only one of them proved dissentient. Aliar Khan, the oldest of them, and not having a single streak of black in his beard, said :—"Well, my children! if really the prisoners have been excited and resolved upon an escape, shall we four be able to overpower them? On the contrary, the moment the gate is opened, they will rush out in a body and, in their flight, will crush us. What shall we do then? Rather let us inform the *Jamadar*."

The second warder responded :—"Why, then, think of informing the *Jamadar* even? Really we do not at all apprehend, that they will ever be able to break the gate. Only they are proving somewhat bothersome. And I, for one, do not think it a sufficient justification for disturbing the *Jamadar*. Well, then, let'em have their own way for the night. In the morning, they'll be sufficiently punished, I dare say."

This view of the warder lulled his comrades into a confidence of the security of their own position for a while, and they began to banter the endeavour of the captives to break open the iron gate. They said :—"For the natives of Bengal to break an iron gate is equivalent to a baboon's singing a song!"

Quite so. An iron gate could not be broken so easily; but the wall might be cracked. And such, indeed, proved to be the case. The framework of the gate was let into the wall; and, a few minutes after, with the help of the clear moon-light, Aliar Khan perceived, that by the force of incessant and regular showers of pedal strokes, there had been produced a crack in that part of the wall, into which the framework of the gate was let. He then said :—"Look here, the crucial moment is come at last! Just run to inform the worthy *Jamadar*! Another moment, and the gate will fall down; hang me, if it does not."

One of the sepoys thereupon ran to deliver the news to the

Jamadar, and the others stood rivetted to the spot, with their eyes, fixed upon the gate, now about to be knocked off its setting.

The wall appeared to be more and more cracking, and the bricks, being knocked off their proper place, now held the frame-work very loosely between them. The clang, too, necessarily increased, and the forcible kicks became more forcible still, till, at last, with a tremendous din, resounding the whole atmosphere, the gate fell heavily down. The sound of 'victory to Luckshmi-narayanji,' shouted out by the liberated captives, was wafted up to the empyrean heights and seemed to be cleaving them.

The addle-pated up-countrymen were so much absorbed in seeing what could be the result, that they had totally forgotten to move out of the way of the falling gate. But the fall itself now brought them back to their senses, and they ran to ward it off. Two managed to get out unscathed, but the remaining one got one of his legs smashed, and he lay prostrate on the ground. On the other hand, like a stream of water, running through a breach in an embankment, rushed out the prisoners and, in their onward career, trod upon the fallen gate, and crushed the maimed sepoy under their feet. Sitaram was the first to come out; and the first thing he did was to wrest the shield, the spear, and the sword from the wounded soldier, and fall upon the rest like a fore-runner of Death. At that moment his mien was just terrible to contemplate; and the mortal wound, he dealt on the guards, lent wings to their legs. The *Jamadar* had not yet arrived.

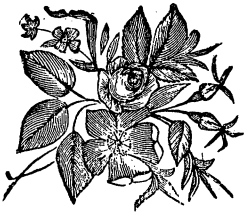
The prisoners ran away, shouting out the name of Hari. With the unsheathed cutlass in his hand, Sitaram stood fixed at a particular spot and defended the rear. After everybody had left the prison, Sitaram entered it once more. He remembered, that a prisoner had been lying stretched in one of the corners, shrouded from head to foot. The prisoner in question had not risen, nor had given any reply. Sitaram had taken the captive for an invalid. It now flashed to his mind, that perhaps the individual could not have cleared out of the prison without help. Accordingly, with a view to ascertain if the prisoner was still there, Sitaram entered the dungeon once again. He saw, that the fellow was yet there, shrouded as before. Sitaram called the person and said:—"Well,

my fellow! everybody has left the prison. Wherefore art thou yet lying like that?"

The person addressed replied :—"What shall I do?"

Oh! 'twas a feminine voice, and to Sitaram it seemed known. He, therefore, eagerly questioned :—"Well, who art thou?"

The person's response was :—"I am Sree."



CHAPTER X

"What has brought thee here, Sree?" asked Sitaram.

Sree replied :—"The sepoys have brought me under arrest."

Sita :—Because thou didst take part in the affray? Yes, yes. These people are perfectly devoid of sense; they are likewise growing more and more tyrannical. However, through divine intercession we have been allowed to breathe the free air once again. Wherefore shouldst thou remain here any longer? Better go to thine own house."

Sree :—There's none in my house; who will protect me there, now that I am raced and chased.?

Sita :—Dost thou then mean to remain here? Remember 'tis a prison house, and thou wilt not be safe in this place!"

Sree :—Why not? Who will do me a harm here?

Sita :—Thou wast a member of the affray; the Fauzdar may hang thee, kill thee, or deal similar other punishment on thee."

"Be it so" was Sree's response. Sitaram then said :—"I am going to Shyampore. Thy brother also is to go there. Ten to one, he may have a house, built there for him to live in. Hie thee to that place, there to live wherever thou choosest."

Sree asked :—"Whom am I to accompany?"

Sita :—Well, I'll procure somebody to escort thee.

Sree :—Whom will you make me the charge of, that will protect me from the hands of Mahamedan tyranny?

Sitaram fell into a reverie. He then broke the silence and said :—"Come, I will escort thee."

Sree started up to a sitting posture. With an up-turned countenance, she fixed her eyes calmly and silently for some time upon Sitaram's face. Then she said :—"Wherefore such a proposal after so long a time?"

Sita :—'Tis very difficult to give the explanation. And what's the good of thy having it at all ?

Sree :—Unless you give it, I won't accompany you. Wherefore shall I accompany you—you who have abandoned me ? Yes, yes ; I will. But if you mean to escort me for a day only—escort me out of pity to save my life—then my decision is, I don't seek such pity. I am your married wife, fully entitled to your affection—to everything you possess. Wherefore, then, shall I accept pity ? One, who has no right, may content one's self with it. No, my lord ! You go alone ; I wont. Since I've been able to while away such a long time without you, then shall I be able alike to shift for myself to-day

Sita :—Come, I'll explain the matter.

Sree :—The deuce you will ! I am your wife, and have the precedence of all others. Nanda is your second wife. I am united to you by the bond of matrimony. I am not a harlot, nor an outcast. Yet without any transgression on my part, you have disespoused me within a few days of my accompanying you to the alter. You have never explained the reason of such disespousal, nor my repeated enquiries have elicited the required answer. On more occasions than one, have I resolved upon self-extirpation for this crime of yours—upon disentangling you from its meshes by making atonement for it myself. Without, therefore, getting the necessary explanation, I will not follow you to-day.

Sita :—Yes, yes, I'll tell thee everything. Only, do give me the assurance, that when I have told thee all these things, thou wilt not leave me ?

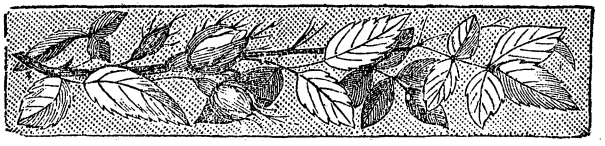
Sree :—I to leave you ?

Sita :—Promise thou wilt not ?

Sree :—Is the matter so very serious ? Then how can I give the assurance before hearing you out ?

Sita :—Hark ! the reports of the sepoys' guns reach our ears. They are busy pursuing the fugitives. So, if thou dost follow me even at this moment, I think, I may, in a manner, escort thee out of the town. But tarry a moment longer, and both of us are lost.

Sree then rose and followed Sitaram.



CHAPTER XI

Without any sort of molestation, did Sitaram clear the boundary of the town with Sree and reached the river-side. Then, taking a seat on the sandy bank, relieved by star-light, he desired Sree to be seated by his side. After Sree had done so, Sitaram entered upon the promised explanation. He said :—"Now, then, listen to what thou dost intend to hear. It would have, however, been infinitely better if thou didst never hear it. Thy earlier reminiscences, I think, will carry you back to the time, when, on the proposal of my marriage with thee, my father wanted to see thy horoscope. But there was no such thing ; and my sire refused to give me in marriage with thee. But thou wast exquisitely beautiful and, my mother insisting, the marriage took place at last. A month later, an astrologer of much fame came to our house. He examined the horoscope of every one of us. My father was highly pleased with his skill. The man was versed in the art of casting horoscope, for which there was no material. And my father engaged him in casting thy horoscope.

The astrologer brought in the document. He read it over to my father. The consequence was, that from that day thou wast marked as an object to be shunned by me.

Sree :—Why ?

Sitaram :—Thy horoscope exhibited, that the Moon in the ascendant, remaining in its own chamber, that is to say, in Cancer, had come within thirty degrees of Saturn.

Sree :—What's the effect of such a casualty ?

Sitaram :—Well, such a contingency, in reference to a woman, renders her the cause of her 'dear one's' death. Now, the husband is the only one, to whom a married woman may apply the term "dear." In as much, therefore, as husband-slaughter is fore-shadowed

by thy horoscope to be one of the deeds of thy existence, thou hast become an object to be renounced by me.

Thus speaking, Sitaram remained speechless for a while. He then resumed :—The astrologer said to my father :—'You forsake this daugher-in-law of yours and make arrangements for your son's remarriage. Because, you see, although generally speaking, a husband is the object of a wedded woman's endearment, yet in a case, in which a husband is not beloved by his wife, the above consequence occurs in respect to other dear relatives. There being no chance of a married couple meeting each other, there will be no love between them, and there being no love on the part of a woman for her husband, the possibility of her being the cause of his death will alike be averted. Therefore you make such arrangements, whereby your son will not be allowed to share the bed of your daughter-in-law, or whereby his affection will be deviated from her.' My father took the advice to be a rational one, and that very day he sent thee over to the house of thy father. He likewise commanded me not to share thy couch, nor to live with thee as man and wife. This is the reason why thou art repudiated."

Sree stood up. She was going to speak something; but Sitaram forced her to be seated again. He then said :—" I have not yet finished. During my father's lifetime, I was totally at his commands, and had to do whatever he would cause to be done by me."

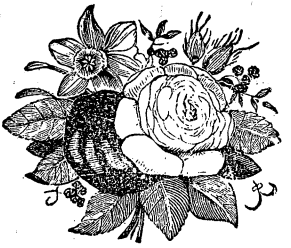
Sree :—And do you mean to say, that you are no longer bound to do his biddings, now that he is in heaven?

Sitaram :—The command of a parent is to be obeyed in season and out season—during his lifetime as well as when he is in heaven. But if a father enjoins a thing highly unjust, is such an injunction to be obeyed? No. Nothing unjust can be performed even at the behest of a father, a mother, or a spiritual preceptor. For, in that case, the command of the One, who is the Father of a father, the Mother of a mother, and the Preceptor of a preceptor is violated To disespouse a wife, without any transgression on her part, is very very unjust, and I am committing such an act in seeking to stick to the directions of my sire. I would have told thee this very soon but—

Sree again rose upon her feet and said :—" This half part of a

mohar you had sent me with instructions, that if any danger befell me, I might present it to you. It is this, that helped me so much in having the life of my brother saved. That you showed so much favour to me notwithstanding that I am separated from you, only showed the immensity of your innate virtues. But never heretofore shall it be allowed to prove serviceable to me—never hencefoward will I appear before you, nor shall you hear anything of me. Whatever view might have been propounded by the worthy astrologer, a woman's only beloved in this world is the husband, and none else. Whether allowed to share his bed or not, a woman's only 'dear one, is the husband' and to me you are ever dear; 'tis no use mincing matter. Henceforward I will remain hundreds of miles away from you.

Having delivered herself in this way, Sree flung away the coin on the sandy bank of the river and separated from Sitaram. She soon vanished from his view, Sitaram knew not, whither.



CHAPTER XII

What! did the fact strike Sitaram, only to-day for the first time? No, no; but yesterday—the moment Sree had appeared in his presence. Had he then recollected it for the first time in this life yesterday? Yes, it seems so. Let us probe the degree of acquaintance, subsisting between Sitaram and Sree. The married couple had met each other for a few days. And what a meeting it had been! Sree had then been a mere girl. Since then she was totally unheard of. Once upon a time, a rumour had reached Sitaram, that Sree had been in troubles, and he had sent her some money, and, along with it, the half of a *mohar*, branded in a certain manner, with instructions, that Sree might present it to him through somebody; and whatever the man, carrying the coin, would ask for, Sitaram would instantly give. But Sree had never called it into requisition, except on the occasion of saving her brother's life.

Yes; these are all true. Yet 'twas Sitaram's duty to have remembered Sree. But there are good many duties, which generally escape our memory. Without sufficient reason, people do not fix their mind upon them. He, who is accustomed to get fresh supplies of money everyday, does not bother his head about a four anna or an eight anna bit, lost on some occasion. A man, having Nanda on the one side and Rama on the other—why should such a man care for a certain Sree? One, who has got the Ganges on the one side and the Jumna on the other, does not strain his mind about the Saraswati, almost dried up and concealed under a vast mass of sand, as she is. One, who is attended by the Moon on the right and the

Chitra on the left—why should he remember the extinguished light of a candle? Rama was comfort, Nanda weal, and Sree risk. And wherefore should a man, living between comfort and weal, remember risk?

But then a powerful impression was made upon Sitaram's mind by Sree's countenance of moon-like charms as well as by her beautyful eyes—those moist eyes, that were ever swimming in a soft langour—those tearful eyes, in the depths of which the heart would be lost! Was then Sitaram smitten with her charms? O fie! far from it. And yet it seems, that a combination of her loveliness, her sufferings, and his own failings, was the cause of this impression. Be that as it may. Some satisfactory settlement of the knotty point might surely have been arrived at. Camly and leisurely, upon a due deliberation of what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what unjust, and with the help of the preceptor and the priest, some steps might surely have been devised for counteracting the command of a father, and having something done towards the achievement of the desired end. But that image of the lion-bestriding Goddess! Oh! dear, dear, 'twill never recur!

On behalf, however, of Sitaram, it is proper to say, that the recollection alone of that image had not carried the conviction of the unjustness of the divorce home to his mind, for the first time in this life. The moment had Sree presented herself before him the last night, had Sitaram seen, that in seeking to adhere to the behest of his parent, he had been committing one of the blackest turpitudes in the universe. Parasuram's axe had presented itself before his mind's eye; and he had resolved upon performing his duty in this respect, after saving the life of Sree's brother, after mollifying the the resentment of Nanda and Rama, and after discussing the point with the venerable Chandrachoorh. But this resolution was weighed down by the chain of events of the following day. By the swollen tide of the revived sentiments of amour, the sandy embankment was washed away. Let Nanda, and Rama, and Chandrachoorh, all, all alone. Now where was Sree?

On rising from his seat, Sitaram hurried towards that part of the forest, where Sree had vanished from his view; but nowhere could he find her. Inside the wilderness, darkness, appeared to have collected together in lumps. At one place, in consequence of some boughs

of a tree being lopped off, or owing to the brightness of the colour of some of them, it looked white ; and Sitaram hurried towards that spot ; but no Sree. He then began to call her out by her name. The echo, produced by the sound, seemed to Sitaram to be the reply given by Sree. He accrodingly rushed in that direction. Again he called her out, and again an echo emanated, and again Sitaram hastened to that quarter. But, alas ! Sree was nowhere. In this way the day dawned while yet was Sitaram calling out "Sree ! Sree !! Sree !!!" But Sree came not !

Well, how is it, that one, who is eagerly called, never comes ! That, which is anxiously looked for, is never found ! The thing, which once got has been lost, is not got again ! Gems are lost. But how is it, that they cannot be found out ? Perhaps if looked for betimes, they might have been obtained, but now 'tis too late. It appears as if our eyes were lost—as if the world were pitch-dark—as if the ways of searching were not known. What, then, is to be done ? Let's persist in searching. One, who is not found out in this world, is the dearest. Once the day had followed the night, Sree would have been the dearest one—would have established her empire over Sitaram's heart. The sweetness of Sree's transcendent charms began now to be wafted up by every tide of Sitaram's heart—her virtues were now uppermost in his thoughts. Where was a proper queen for him, who had resolved upon the foundation of an empire ? Was either Nanda or Rama fit to occupy a throne ? Or that woman, who, standing on the branch of the tree like the Goddess Mahishmardini, * had won the battle at the signal of her wrap's end ? What could not Sitaram achieve with the co-operation of Sree ?

Suddenly a ray of hope gleamed in Sitaram's bosom. He had directed Sree's brother, Gangaram, to cross over to Shyampore. Gangaram must have gone there. This idea served as an incentive for Sitaram to hasten thither. On reaching Shyampore Sitaram saw, that Gangaram was waiting for him. The first question, Sitaram put to Gangaram, was :—"Gangaram ! where's your sister ?"

Surprised Gangaram replied :—"I know nothing about her

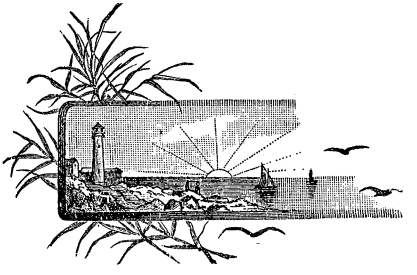
* The tormentrix of the Asur Buffalo.

except that you made her over to the care of the venerable Chandrachoorh."

Sitaram cried :—"Perdition ! she has parted company with the venerable gentleman. Has she not wended her way hither ?"

"No" was Gangaram's response. Sitaram then added :—"Then go you this moment in search of her. Return not till you've finished a thorough search. Here am I, and here do I purpose to stay for some time. Should you not venture to go to a particular locality, better employ other men. Here's the wherewithal to meet the necessary expenses."

Accrodingly, provided with the necessary funds, Gangaram set out in quest of his sister. With utmost care, he went on looking for her for a whole week. But in vain. Thus frustrated in his endeavours to find her out, did he come back and communicate every detail to Sitaram.



CHAPTER XIII

Having regained partial composure of mind at Shyampore, Sitaram set out, one day, in company of his wives, upon a visit at the temple of Luckshminarayanji.

The temple of these idols was embowelled into the earth, in one of the neighbouring forests. At the command of Sitaram, it was dug out, and within it, were found old images of the god and the goddess. To-day for the first time, did Sitaram go out upon a visit at the temple. Accompanying him were Nanda and Rama—all carried in litters.

On reaching the outskirts of the forest, all the three dismounted from their litters and, with a single guide, walked into the wilderness. The rare loveliness of the scene had the effect of elevating their spirits to a certain extent. In the midst of foliage of the darkest green, were visible clusters and clusters of flowers. Fresh flowers of white, green, bluish green, and of mixed green and indigo, opening themselves in layers upon layers, rendered the atmosphere delicious with their fragrance. Concealed in their midst, were feathered races of various colours gaily caroling in a variety of voices. The passage was very narrow—one had to push one's way through masses of the branches of trees and so forth. At one time, Nanda and Rama got the end of their wrap entangled in some prickly shrub. At another, a cluster of flowers kissed their cheeks. At one time, disturbed at the shaking of a branch, the butterfly left it and began to fly before their face. At another, startled at the sound of their footsteps, the affrighted hind left her bed and fled away. Leaves fell, flowers dropped, birds flew, hares ran. In the midst of things of these sorts, did Sitaram and his two wives reach the vicinity of the temple. They then dismissed the guide.

They found, that the temple was sunk into the earth. The top only was visible from outside. At Sitaram's order, a flight of stairs was built to reach the temple door, and a lamp made to burn there to mitigate darkness. He, however, allowed none of his dependants to attend him there, as he had intended to visit the idols only with his two spouses.

On reaching the temple door, to his utter surprise, did Sitaram encounter a Mahamedan, seated close to the images. Amazed he asked :—" Well, who art thou, my good fellow ?"

The Mahamedan replied :—" A mendicant."

Sitaram :—A Mahamedan ?

The Faquir :—"A Mahamedan, to be sure."

Sitaram :—Perdition !

The Faquir :—You are a big landlord. What, then, has brought about your partition ?

Sitaram :—A Mahamedan inside the temple of an idol !

The Faquir :—What harm, my child ? Do you think the idol is thereby defiled ?

Sitaram :—Of a verity it is. Why, thy head seems to be turned !

The Faquir :—Well, then, speaking of this idol of yours, what does He do ?

Sitaram :—Why, He is Almighty—the cause of the creation, the preservation and the destruction of the universe !

The mendicant :—Who has created you then ?

Sitaram :—'Tis He.

The Faquir :—Who has made me ?

Sitaram :—Again I say 'tis He. He, who is God, has created everybody.

The Faquir:—He was not desecrated by creating a Mahamedan. Only when a Mahamedan sits at the gate of His temple, then He is unhallowed ! Is this the wisdom, my child ! that has instigated you to come over to this place to establish a Hindoo dominion ? One word more and I have done. Where does this God of yours reside ? Do you mean to say, that He creates, preserves, and destroys the universe from His place in this temple, or He has got some other place to live in ?

Sitaram :—He is Omnipresent—present in everything and present in every being.

The Faquir :—Then He must be present in me ?

Sitaram :—Certainly ; but why do you people not admit the fact ?

The Faquir :—Well, my child, he is present in me day and night, and is not desecrated, but has just been so, because I have seated myself at the door of his temple !

Had there been present, at the moment, a Brahmin belonging to the school of Hindoo logicians, then some satisfactory answer might have been given. But unfortunately, Sitaram was not versed in logic ; and he felt positively little at his failure to vouchsafe a proper reply. The only response, he could stammer forth, was :—" Well, such is the custom of our country."

The Faquir replied :—" I am told, my child, you're resolved upon the foundation of a Hindoo dominion ! But if you suffer yourself to be so much enthralled to the so-called custom of your country, you'll never succeed. If you do not treat the Hindoos and the Mahamedans alike, then, in this country, peopled, as it is by the Hindoos and the Mahamedans, you'll never prove equal to the task of maintaining your rule. Your sway, too, instead being a just one will be one of injustice. That one Being hath made the Hindoos and the Mahamedans. He, who is a Hindoo, has been created a Hindoo by Him, and he, who is a Mahamedan, has been so made by Him. Both are His children, and both will be your subjects. Enslaved, therefore, to the custom of your country do not make any distinction at all. Distinction between one class of subjects and another is an injustice, and a dominion of injustice never lasts long."

Sitaram retorted :—" But do not the Mahamedan rulers make any such distinction ?"

The Faquir :—They do ; and for this one reason their empire is going to pieces. For this injustice their sovereignty will dwindle. If you can take it, well and good. If not, others will usurp it. And when you say, that God is present alike in the Hindoos and the Mahamedans, why should you make any distinction ? A Mahamedan though I am, I make no distinction. Now, however, you perform the worship of the idols. If you wish it, tell me, so that, while departing, I may come round and pronounce my benedictions upon you."

Sitaram said :—"I see thou art a wise man, and I earnestly request thee to come round."

The Faquir then parted. After Sitaram had paid his visit and performed his worship, he appeared again. Sitaram had a long conversation with him. He saw, that the man was an erudite one. He was well-versed in Persian and Arabic, very well knew Sanskrit, and had read a large number of works, treating of the Hindoo theology into the bergain, He further observed, that although he was far advanced in age, yet he was perfectly relieved of all sorts of worldly ties. He was an ascetic and was in the habit of seeing all things in all places in an equal light. Observing him to be a man of such a character, even Nanda and Rama shook off their bashfulness and, occupying seats a little off, listened to his utterances, pregnant, as they were, with wisdom.

At the time of separation Sitaram said to the Faquir :—"The advices, thou hast imparted to us, are very rational and we'll adhere to them to the best of our ability. But 'tis my earnest desire, that thou dost fix thy habitation in my new metropolis, so that, if I happen, at any time, to act contrary to them, easy access may be had to thee to have the deviations rectified. Frequent reference to wisdom, such as thine, may ensure my kingdom's welfare."

The Faquir replied :—"Then you, too, give me an assurance on a certain point, and I'll give you the assurance you want. What name you propose to call your capital by ?"

Sitaram .—Why, its present name is Shyampore, and 'twill ever be called by that name.

The Faquir :—If you consent to give it the name of Mahammad pore, then I may agree to your proposal.

Sitaram :—Wherefore such a nomenclature ?

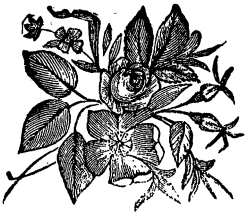
The Faquir :—In such a case I may be quite confident, that you'll treat the Hindoos and the Mahamedans alike.

After a brief reflection Sitaram agreed. The mendicant, thereupon, said :—"I am a Faquir and, as such, not permitted to live in a house. But I'll always be close to you and will let you know wherever I live. You will get me at any moment you require."

While departing the mendicant blessed the three. Upon Sitaram his benediction was :—" Your heart's desire shall be gratified." To

Nanda he said :—" You are fit to occupy a throne. Adhere to the duties of a queen, and as regards the general duties of a woman, do unto your husband as you are bid by your Sastras and good shall be the result. To Rama the Faquir addressed as follows :—" You, my child, seem to be of a timid nature ! Remember the utterances of a Faquir. Yield not to fear at the moment of danger. Fear begets evils. It does not behove a queenly lady to give way to fear."

The three then retraced their way homewards.



CHAPTER XIV

The rural tract on the bank of the river Madhumati, called Shyampore, was Sitaram's ancestral property. He now took shelter there. Those also, that had escaped from prison, along with him, now left Bhusana and the adjacent villages for the fear of suffering from the wrath of the Fauzdar, and removed, bag and baggage, to this place, and took refuge with Sitaram. Those also, that were implicated in that day's affray, being sure, out of the consciousness of their own guilt, of being punished by the the Fauzdar, now began to erect houses and dwellings in Sitaram's protection. Sitaram, too, called upon every one of his subjects, dependants and debtors to come from every direction and live in Shyampore. Thus the once insignificant village of Shyampore became, all on a sudden, a great and densely populated town. Sitaram now turned his attention to the construction of the town. Trade naturally rears its head in a thickly peopled locality, and, as such, shop-keepers, traders, artizans merchants, money-lenders and various other sorts of men of business resorted to Shyampore. Sitaram too took care to settle them there. In this way the newly established town became the seat of *Hauts*, *Bazars*, *Gaunjas*, Farms and *Bundars* It has already been said, that Sitaram was possessed of immense treasures, handed down to him by his fore-fathers ; and he now applied them to the embellishment of his new capital. In consequence of an increased tenantry, there was a corresponding enhancement in his income. And the report of the establishment of a Hindoo dominion brought into the new capital from various parts of the country flocks and flocks of people, who were either oppressed by the Mahamedans, or fearful of being punished for offences committed against the laws of the land, or desirous of pre-

serving their faith in the protection of a Hindoo chief. The sources of Sitaram's income were, as a matter of fact, multiplied. Towards the adornment of the just founded metropolis he now began to erect a palatial building for his own residence, and temples, rearing their head high in the air, to dig tanks provided with flights of stairs as well as to construct public thoroughfares. The subjects, too, gave him money, in order to assist him in the foundation of the monarchy of their own accord. Those, that had no money, lent their personal services towards the construction of the capital and the security of the dominion.

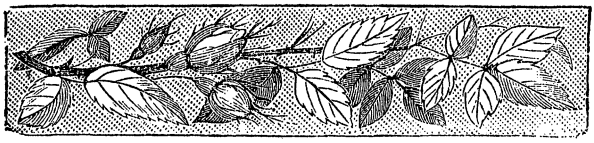
In consequence of Sitaram's own dexterity, and the support he obtained from his subjects, encouraged as they were, at the idea of the foundation of a Hindoo dominion, all these things were soon brought to a perfection. But he did not now assume the title of a ruler. For, he knew, if he had done so without obtaining a *sandad* from the Emperor of Delhi, it would have afforded the Mahamedans an excuse for bringing about his ruin. Up till that moment, he was not suspected of having done anything, that could have stamped him as a rebel. The Fauzdar knew, that in the affray, resulting in the release of Gangaram, Sitaram had taken no active part, far less he had himself borne arms. Equally was it believed amongst the Mahamedans, that Sitaram had not incited the prisoners to escape from custody. Even the fact of his captivity was not known to the Fauzdar. Accordingly there was nothing to set him down as a rebel. This fact was more firmly established by his refraining from assuming the title of a monarch, by his acknowledging the Emperor of Delhi as the paramount power, by his sending the Government revenue to the public treasury in proper times, and by otherwise maintaining feelings of amity with the Mahamedans. Besides, the fact of his calling his new capital by the name of Mahammadpur, and his equal treatment of the Hindoos and the Mahamedans, did a great way towards cementing friendly feelings between the rulers and himself. He had seen, that in the then unsettled situation, the slightest tiff with the Mahamedans would only have paved the way for his ruin. And he was resolved upon the maintenance of good feelings towards the rulers, till he attained the necessary strength.

Yet at the report of the increase in the number of his subjects,

the enhancement of his income, the power he wielded over the laity, his fame, and his general prosperity, Torab Khan, the Fauzdar, grew alarmed. In the secret depths of his heart, the latter resolved upon plundering and pillaging Mahammadpur, on the slightest plea imaginable, and thereby destroying Sitaram. And where was the lack of such pleas? Torab Khan required Sitaram to capture and send over all the fugitives and bad characters, who had taken shelter with him. In reply, Sitaram said, that on receipt of the names of such people he would carry out the Fauzdar's order. Torab Khan then sent a list of those men. But that led to the fugitives altering their names, so that, Sitaram could get hold of nobody answring to the name mentioned in the list. He, therefore, wrote in reply, that none of his subjects admitted having ever had such names.

In this way were the two powers fencing with each other. But it had the effect of betraying the intention of the one to the other. Torab Khan began to collect army for destroying Sitaram, while the latter commenced the fortification of the town for self-defence. He now fell to the task of drilling and disciplining his subjects for military occupations and to that of the collection of arms and ammunition in the *Sundarbans* Pass.

Towards the attainment of these objects Sitaram was assisted by three persons quite up to the mark, and it is for the co-operation of these three, that the task was so very quietly accomplished. One of these persons was Chandrachoorh Tarkalankar, the second, Mrinmay, and the third, Gangaram. In matters, falling within the scope of sound wisdom, he was succoured by Chandrachoorh, of strength and daring, by Mrinmay, and of activity, by Gangaram. Gangaram was now living in Mahammadpur and had become the refugee as well as the help-mate of Sitaram. The Faquir used to pay occasional visits. On being asked, he would give sound advice and would dissuade everybody from quarrel. So, things went on smoothly for the present.



CHAPTER XV

While, on the one hand, Sitaram had three individuals to succour him, on the other, he had one, highly inimcal to his grave and important interests. This individual was his younger wife, Rama.

Rama stood in profound terror of quarrels. Sitaram's courage was a source of her fear. She particularly dreaded any sort of discords with the Mahamedans in as much as they were the rulers of the land. Over and above this, Rama dreamt a very hideous dream one night. It appeared to her, that the Mahamedans, having been victorious in battle, had made herself and Sitaram captives and were belaboring them. Now the countenance of those myriads of Mahamedans, brightened, as they were, each with two rows of teeth and long and ample beard, seemed every moment floating before Rama's eyes—their wild cries, constantly ringing in her ears. Rama now pressed Sitaram and urged him to approach the footstepts of the Mahamedans' seat, with tears in his eyes, and the Mahamedans would forgive him out of mercy. But Sitaram paid no heed to Rama's overture, and she, too, refrained from food and rest. Sitaram tried to convince her, that he had done nothing to incur the Mahamedans' displeasure ; but to no effect. Like the showers of *Sraban**, the tears now began to rain down Rama's cheeks. Disgusted at this sort of behaviour, Sitaram desisted from paying his usual visits to Rama. As a matter of course t'was all the better for the first, taking Sree the second, wife Nanda.

This state of affairs only tended to convince the girlish Rama more firmly still, that this quarrel with the Mahamedans would accom-

---

* The last half of July and the first of August.

plish her ruin. She, therefore, now began to race and chase Sitaram. Now-a-days Sitaram did not even tread upon that portion of the mansion, that was assigned to Rama, on account of her cryings and weepings, her beseechings and entreaties as well as on account of her striking her own forehead against the ground. Accordingly Rama now began to lie in ambush in the passage, which took Sitaram to the apartment of his elder spouse, Nanda ; and, when convenient, she would fall upon him all unawares, and lead him into her own quarters. Then would follow the performance of the same programme of cryings and weepings, of beseechings and entreaties, of bruising the forehead, of whinings and whimperings. At one time 'twas a copious shower, at another, a mere drizzling. At one moment 'twas the nor'-westers, at another, the October storm, the subject-matter being the same—"Go and approach the footsteps of the Mahamedans' seat with tears in your eyes. Or else what danger may befall us." Sitaram felt as if molten lead were being poured into the very bones of his skeleton.

At last when Rama saw, that Mahammadpur had become a city more densely populated than Bhusana, when she saw its fortifications, and ramparts, and moats, as well as the cannons, that were placed in rows, when she likewise saw, its armouries and magazines, filled with balls, and bullets, and cannons, and guns, and various other weapons, when moreover she found groups and groups of soldiers being drilled, she became quite dejected and took to her bed. When once she rose for worshipping the gods, she prayed everyday with clasped hands, before the particular god, she was a votary of, in this strain :—" O God ! let Mahammadpur go to pieces, so that under Mahamedan protection, we may while away our days, without having anything to ruffle the evenness of our worldly career. Deliver us from this the greatest of all evils, that threatens us."

When Rama met Sitaram, she scrupled not to pray in the above manner in his presence.

The reader must have seen, that Sitaram had got more love for Rama than for Nanda. But, 'tis useless to say, that this sort of behaviour on Rama's part had rendered her Sitaram's eye-sore. Now and then would he say unto himself :—" Oh, that I had Sree to help me in this crisis !" Day and night was Sree present before his mind's

eye. Neither Nanda nor Rama was equal to Sree, whose image was now indelibly impressed upon his memory. But never had he suffered himself to give vent to what was uppermost in his mind, lest it should have been painful to Nanda or Rama. Only once, when he was much disgusted at this unpleasant behaviour of Rama, did he forget himself in this respect and said :—" Alas, that I have got Rama in the place of Sree !"

Rama wiped away the tears, that started in her eyes at this utterance of Sitaram and replied :—" Well, why don't you take Sree again ? There's none to prevent you !"

Sitaram heaved a profound sigh and said :—" Where am I to find her again ?"

The expression sank in the depths of Rama's soul. Whatever might be the shortcomings of Rama, they had her extreme affection for her husband and son for their origin—she was so much anxious lest any danger should have befallen them. Not that Sitaram perceived it not ; yet he could not help being displeased with her. And this for her whinings and whimperings—for the difficulties she threw in his way—for the amount of discomfort, she brought about. Connubial happiness is consisted not only in the love, which a married couple may bear for each other, but in the possession of a similar bent of mind and of one heart in common. Rama thought :—" Without any failing on my part, have I been deprived of my husband's affection." Sitaram exclaimed :—" O thou, my spiritual guide, save me from Rama's love !"

These failings on the part of Rama went a great way towards rendering the image, already impressed upon Sitaram's mind, brighter still day by day. Sitaram had determined to devote himself, heart and soul, to the establishment of the Hindoo dominion, and to nothing else, But Sree now usurped half of his mental throne. Sitaram now thought, that the retributive justice of Heaven was inflicting punishment on him, through Rama, for the offence, he had committed in respect to Sree. There could be no other atonement.

But that Rama alone was instrumental in setting up this image in this temple was far from the case. Nanda too lent her aid ; but in a different way. Nanda was not at all fearful of the Mahamedans. Since Sitaram had courage enough, Nanda had nothing to do with

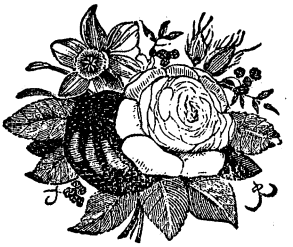
that. Nanda thought, that her husband was the best judge of the reasonableness or otherwise of the course. Should he deem it proper, why, then, should she give herself any fidget? Therefore, banishing all these thoughts from her mind, Nanda dedicated her very life, as it were, to the nursing of her husband. To the best of her ability, did Nanda stick to the piece of advice, the Faquir had imparted to her, in the temple of Luckshminarayanji. The affection of a mother, the devotion of a daughter and the tending of a maid-servant would Sitaram get from Nanda alone. But where was his better-half? She, who would be hopeful of his ambition, would share his heart's desire, would be a succour in matters difficult and a minister in crises—who would cheer up his spirits when drooping under the weight of dangers, and be happy in his success—where was she? The Goddess Luckshmi was fit only for paradise. But now that 'twas a campaign where was Singhavahini? It was therefore, that Nanda's affection simply would bring Sree back into Sitaram's mind. At every step it would remind him of her, who had guided an excited army as also of her cry of "kill them, kill them, kill the foes—foes of the country, foes of the Hindoos, foes of myself!" It was therefore, that Sitaram now commenced mentally worshipping that image of Singhavahini, full of dignity as it appeared to him.

I know not what amour is. Met, infatuated and rendered reckless of all consequences—why, such a wildfire can never be met with in this wide world. Amour is read of in books. But in the practical world, there is nothing of its nature except love and affection. The amour, read of in books, seems to be something unreal, but conjured up into existence by poets and romancists, simply to please young men and young ladies. Then one thing must, at the same time, be admitted, and that is, that love and affection, that are so much coveted in this world, are due to the old and cannot be manifested towards the new. Men are naturally urged by the sentiments of love and affection towards those, in whose company a pretty long time has been whiled away, whose virtues have exhibited themselves in weal and in woe, in times favourable as well as unfavourable, and with whom they have been associated in bonds of happiness and misery alike. But something else is due to the new. They have certain merits of their own, because of their novelty: In addition, there

is something else. We do not know their precise virtues, but can guess them from symptoms. Those that are tried are limited; those that are not tried but guessed—to put limits to them—depends upon the state of the mind. Hence the virtues of the new seem at times to be unstinted—hence the desire for the new becomes quite uncontrollable. If you want to call this amour, there is such a thing in the world, and such an amour is really very maddening. 'Tis due only to the new. It sweeps away the old. Sree was new to Sitaram; and that maddening sentiment now established its empire over Sitaram's heart. Both Nanda and Rama were carried away in its tide.

Alas, New! art thou alone beautiful, or Old also? But, then, thou art, O New, a part of the Eternal! Of the Eternal we know only a little, and that little is old, and the remainder new, to us. What is unknown of the Eternal is also eternal. Thou art, O New, a part of the Eternal. Therefore thou art so very maddening. To Sitaram Sree now appeared to be a part of the Eternal.

Alack! are not you and I destined to get New? Shall not you and I get Sree? That day, when we leave everything old, shall we get everything new—shall stand face to face with the Eternal. We shall get Sree on closing our eyes. Till then, let us pluck up our courage, and meditate upon the name of Hari. 'Tis Hari's name, that procures the Eternal.



CHAPTER XVI

"Here am I on the bank of the Vaitarani! They say, once one has crossed it, all troubels come to an end. Will my troubles ever see an end?" cried Sree, standing alone on the sandy bank of the rapidly flowing Vaitarani. Behind her, were visible, like dark clouds, the peaks of the Nilgiry and before was flowing the blue and tortuous stream, through a spacious area, resembling an immense sheet of silver stone. Next came to the view, the temple of Saptamatrika,* on a flight of stairs of stones, while the images themselves, placed inside the temple, broke upon the view to a certain extent. Indrani of queenly grandeur; Vaisnavi of delicious charms; Kaumari; Brahmani; the death-productive Chhaya, that was the very personification of terribleness; Varahi, bedecked with various fineries, whose thighs, arms and legs as well as the volume of whose bust, were splendidly developed, down whose furrowed neck, resembling a conch-shell, came waving a chain of gems, whose stomach was capacious, who had a piece of silken drapery on, and whose mouth resembled that of a hog; the horrible Chamunda, whose person was reduced to a skeleton, covered with a parched skin, among the hair of whose head, there was not a single streak of black, who was perfectly denuded of clothing, and who held, in her hand, a severed human head, were adorning the temple from beneath the oppressive piles and piles of flowers, sandal paste and leaves of *Vilva*. Behind it, was visible the top of the temple of Visnu, uprearing its head so as to reach the heavenly vault. Next came Gururh, the king of the

*Seven manifestations of the Prime Sakti.

feathered tribes, perched on a pillar of blue marble, while, from a great distance, broke upon the view, in the horizon, the huge bodies of Mounts Udaygiri and Lalitgiri. Sree surveyed them and exclaimed :— "Alas ! here's the Vaitarani ; will my troubles see an end if I cross it ?"

"Well, 'tis not the Vaitarani you mean—' The hot Vaitarani at the horrible door of Death—.' First present yourself at Death's door, and then you will find that Vaitarani," somebody said this in reply from behind. Sree turned to see who it was, and saw a Bhairabi* Sree ejaculated:—" Oh, dear, the same Bhairabi ! Well, then, tell me, my dear ! if the house of Death, is on this, or on the other, side of the Vaitarani."

The Bhairabi's countenance relaxed into a smile, and she said :— "In order to reach the house of Death, one has to cross the Vaitarani. Wherefore, my love ! do you ask such a question ? Do you suffer the pangs of Death even on this side ? "

Sree :—Methinks the pangs are on both sides.

The Bhairabi :—No such thing, dear one ! The pangs are all on this side. The pangs, of which you must have heard, we take along with ourselves from this side. All the vices, accumulated in this world, we collect in a bundle and get conveyed, in the boat of the ferryman, plying in the Vaitarani, free of freight. Then, after reaching the house of Death, we calmly and leisurely unpack the treasures, and each of us help ourselves to them severally.

Sree :—Well, friend ! is there nothing to help me to leave the bundle on this side ? If so, tell me, pray, so that I may make arrangement for its disposal and get myself wafted over to the other side, while yet the sun shines. 'Tis no use being overtaken by night.

The Bhairabi :—Wherefore are you in such a hurry, my chick ? You are only in the morning of your existence !

Sree :—There may be a high wind with the advance of the day.

The Bhairabi was not apprehensive of a storm—was yet unripe in age. That's why Sree ventured to address her thus. The Bhairabi, too, met her with a similar answer and said :—" Do you stand in fear of a storm ? Haven't you got a dexterous boatman ?

* A woman, who, having renounced the domestic sphere, has dedicated her life to the worship of Siv and his consort Durga.

Sree:—Yes I have; but I have refused to avail myself of his boat. Wherefore should I encumber his boat?

The Bhairabi :—And so you've prosecuted your searches till you've thus reached the banks of the Vaitarani—haven't you?

Sree :—I'm resolved upon finding out a cleverer boatman. I'm told, that He, who adorns Srikshetra, is the ferryman to take people to the other side.

The Bhairabi :—I, too, am in quest of that boatman. What can be the harm in our going together? But wherefore are you alone to-day? The other day, when I met you on the banks of the Suvarnarekha, you had a number of people in your company. Wherefore are you thus left to yourself at present.

Sree :—I've none to take care of me in this world, that is to say, I had many; but voluntarily have I renounced one and all. In the company of a number of pilgrims, was I going on a pilgrimage to Srikshetra. But the *panda*, * whom we had for our guide, seemed intent to honor me with his amours. Apprehending a little persecution at his hands, I've slipped away during the night.

The Bhairabi :—What now?

Sree :—Now I'm deliberating, what's the use of a double crossing? A single one is much better—the water is deep enough!

The Bhairabi :—On that point we'll have a discussion between ourselves. Then you'll be at liberty to act according to what may be the result of such discussion. The Vaitarani is not to be scared away on account of your presence! Now, then, what say you? Are you prepared to accompany me?

Sree's mind lost its equillbrium. She had not got a pice with her. Since leaving the company of the pilgrims, she had got nothing to appease the cravings of hunger. She had seen, that either beggary, or death was the alternative left. It now seemed, that in the company of this Bhairabi, some *other* alternative might turn up. Yet it seemed dubious. She said :—"May I ask you a question, my dear? What's the means of your livelihood?"

The Bhairabi :—Beggary.

---

* One of a number of people, to whom the idol of a shrine belongs, and who takes care of the pilgrims.

Sree :—I can't have recourse to that; I think the Vaitarani is much easier.

The Bhairabi :—You'll never be suffered to beg. That, I'll do for you.

Sree :—You, who are so very young,—younger, perhaps, than myself and of such transcendent beauty,—how dare you, my dear—

The Bhairabi was exquisitely beautiful; perhaps more so than Sree herself. But to conceal the charms, she had begrimed her body thickly with ashes. It had, however, failed to bring about the desired end. Like a light, enclosed in a ground-glass globe, the light of the charms had become brighter still.

In response to Sree's utterance the Bhairabi said :—"We are ascetics, having nothing to tempt us back into the world and, as such, we have nothing to fear from. We are ever protected by Divine Justice.

Sree :—I see 'tis indeed the case with you. You've nothing to be apprehensive of, in as much as you are a *sannyasini*.* But how am I to accompany you, like a fly, having its nest in a leaf of the *vail*† tree, and how are you, on your side, to introduce this fly to people? Will you say, that it has flewn up to you?

The Bhairabi's features now expanded into the sweetest smile. On her lucious lips, that smile had the effect of brightening up her charms, concealed though they were under coatings of ashes, like a flash of lightning in an over-clouded sky. Sree thought :—"Had there been present one of the opposite sex, he should have thought :—'a Bhairabi indeed!'"

The Bhairabi :—Why? you also can adopt this sort of toilete!

Sree shuddered visibly and replied :—"What right have I to become a Bhairabi?"

The Bhairabi :—Nothing was further from my mind. Even am I not a Bhairabi in the true sense of the word. And, since you say you've renounced everything, then, if there be nothing, in your mind, savouring of vice, in that case, there can be no harm in becoming a Bhairabi, But let that be put out of the question. For

* A woman who has entered the fourth order, prescribed for Brahmans.
† Colloquial for *Vilva*.

the present I do not hint on that. For the present only, why not adopt this sort of gear as a disguise? What harm can possibly be worked in that?

Sree :—Shall I be required to cut off the hairs of my head? Know you, that my husband is living.

The Bhairabi :—Lo and behold, I have not done so!

Sree :—But you wear your hairs in matted locks.

The Bhairabi :—No—not that even, But, then, I never anoint them with oil, and so they have stuck together.

Sree :—Your hairs have matted themselves into ringlets like so many hoods of snakes, so that I feel more than inclined to anoint them with oil, comb and dress them for you!

The Bhairabi :—Leave those things to be done in the next world—I mean, if endowed with human features again. Now, then, may I dress you out as a Bhairabi?

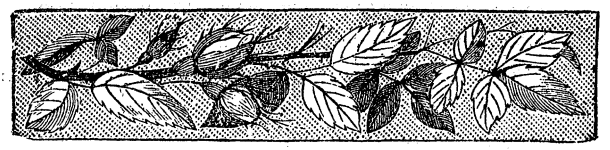
Sree :—Only a few coatings of ashes on the hairs, and the toilete is complete?

The Bhairabi :—Oh, no! The *gairic**, the *rudrakshas*†, the ashes—in fact all the accessories of the toilete—I have got in this red bag of mine, and I will give you everything.

Sree hesitated for a while and then agreed. Thereupon, taking their seat at the foot of a secluded tree, that charming Bhairabi dressed out Sree as another charming Bhairabi. The mass of her hair, she anointed with ashes, put her on a piece of *garic*, gave her *rudrakshas* to wear on the neck as well as on the arms, begrimed her body throughout with ashes and, at last, keeping an eye on Sree's complexion, the Bhairabi put a mark on her forehead with red sandal paste. Then, sallying forth like Madhu‡ and Manmatha§, intent, as they had been, on winning a victory over the entire creation, they crossed the Vaitarani and spent the night in the guest-house, attached to a certain Deva-mandir.¶

---

* A piece of wrap, dyed in a certain way to suit ascetics.
† The stone of a kind of fruit, found in forests and used for making strings.
‡ The spring.
§ Cupid.
¶ A temple.



CHAPTER XVII

Leaving their bed early next morning, Sree and the Bhairabi performed their ablution and incantations in the waters of the Kharasrota, and decked out, as usual, in ashes, *rudrakshas* &c, sallied forth, illuminating the high road to Orissa, like a couple of moving jets of lights. The inhabitants of that part of the country were accustomed to the sight of a variety of pilgrims. None excited their surprise. But these people even were very much astonished to see these two. Some of them said:—"What angels are going?" Others remarked:—"They must be some of the goddesses:" Some people bowed their head before Sree and the Bhairabi; while others asked for blessings to be possessed of riches and happiness. One, who was regarded as a Pandit by the mass, forbade them and said:—"Let'em alone. They seem to be Rukmini and Satyabhama, going upon a visit to their lord in their wonted features." Another was of opinion, that Rukmini and Satyabhama were, at the moment, in Srikshetra, and their calling upon a visit to their lord was, by no means, possible; he, therefore, took them for Sriradhica and Chandravali And as they were the daughters of milkmen, that fact, in his opinion, accounted for their walking up to their destination. This view having been unanimously adopted, a wicked woman cried:—"Stop, stop, or go; but mind there's Bhowneri* and she will give you a sound thrashing!"

On the other hand, Sriradhica and Chandravali continued their journey absorbed in their own conversation. The Bhairabi was an ascetic, having nothing to tie her up to this world. For a long time she had no friends; and in as much as she had got a friend to-day, her mind was a little enlivened. The tide of her life was, by no

* Subhadra.

means, dried up yet, although the reverse was the case with Sree ; because Sree had the bitter experience of vicissitudes and misfortunes. An ascetic is above the sphere of things like these. A portion of the conversation, that was maintained between them, we lay down for the behoof of our readers.

The Bhairabi said :—" You say, your husband is still living, and is prepared to take you to live with you as husband and wife again. Why, in spite of it, you have forsaken your home, I do not ask you. For what have I to do with matters, connected with your domestic affaris ? But, then, am I at liberty to ask you, if you have any inclination to return home ?"

Sree :—Do you know palmistry ?

The Bhairabi :—No ; do you mean to say, that in order to ascertain *that*, palmistry is to be had recourse to ?

Sree :—Far from it. But in that case, after having the marks and lines of my palm examined by you, and with your consent, I might have come to a settlement of the point.

The Bhairabi :—I have no pretensions to palmistry. I can, however, take you to such a man, who is above the sphere of error, so far as this as well as all other branches of learning are concerned.

Sree :—Where is he ?

The Bhairabi :—In the grotto of Hastigumpha in Mount Lalitgiri, there lives a hermit. I allude to him.

Sree :—Where is Lalitgiri ?

The Bhairabi :—If we attempted, we might reach it after nightfall.

Sree :—Let's tramp off.

The twins then hastened on. Had there been present an astronomer, he would have said, that the planets Thurs and Venus, being united to each other, had been vested with an "accelerated motion."

CHAPTER XVIII

Between Mounts Udaygiri on one side and the Lalitgiri on the other, flows the rippling and pellucid stream of Virupa, on her career towards the sea. From the tops of these two mountains, the earth below appears to be highly captivating—the earth, that is ever adorned with thousands and thousands of palm trees, or bedecked with paddy or grain fields. As an infant, when lifted on the arms of its mother, sees her ever beautiful, so do men, on casting their eyes down from the summit of a mountain, perceive beauties in the earth. Mount Udaygiri (at present known by the name of Oltigiri) is full of various kinds of trees; but Lalitgiri (now called Naltigiri) is a mass of stones, perfectly barren of all sorts of vegetable productions. Time there was, when its top and the declivities were embellished with architectural monuments and Buddhistic temples. Its present embellishments consist of sandal trees, growing on its tops, or bricks or stones,—the remains of ruined buildings, or of beautiful images, carved out of stones,—driven into the earth. Some of them, if embodied in some of the sumptuous mansions of Calcutta, would surely have added to the beauty of the "City of Palaces." Alas! that the Hindoos should have to learn how to make dolls in Industrial schools! Leaving the Kumarsambhav, we read Swinburne, put aside the Gita in preference to Mill, and lose ourselves in admiration at the China dolls, imported from Europe, but do not care to find out the art of sculpture, that had once flourished in Orissa! There's no knowing what awaits our lot!

I'm simply committing to paper what I have seen with my own eyes. Mount Lalitgiri will remain indelibly impressed upon my mind. On all sides, occupying an area of many many miles, are fields of paddy of the liveliest yellow, serving as a yellow-colored

waist-cloth for Dame Earth. Besides that, like her ornaments, stand thousands and thousands of palm trees—in one row, following another of thousands and thousands again, erect as darts, with beautiful leaves, and full of grandeur. Through this area, flows the Virupa in the midst of grain fields, decked with blue and yellow flowers. It seems, as if somebody had designed a river upon a soft carpet. But let all these things pass. Around are visible the great and immortal deeds of mortals, long departed this life. Was he a Hindoo, such as we are, who polished stones in this manner? Who thus linked them together without bond—was he a Hindoo like ourselves? And who carved out these statues—statues, that were the personified blending of masculine firmness with sweet beauty, and embellished with ornaments of flowers celestial, whose charms were enhanced by the shaking of the ends of their wraps dripping wet, all whose limbs were of perfect beauty—I said, who carved out these statues, were they too Hindoos like ourselves? And these statues of females—those females, whose lips wreathed in a combination of resentment, love, pride and good luck, who had the finest of silks for their dress, down whose neck, furrowed as a conch shell, came waving strings of gems, and whose frame stooped under the weight of a highly matured youth—the images of females,

Who limbs of sylphid symmetry did bear,
Whose form expanded with a splendid youth,
Whose lips like cherries ripe and teeth like pearls,
And slenderness of waist the wasp scared.
Whose navels deep were exquisite in shape,
And eyes resembled those of startled hinds,—

those who carved out these statues of females—were they, too, Hindoos like ourselves? The Hindoos then came to my mind. 'Twas at this moment, that the recollection flashed to my mind, that the Upanishad, the Gita, the Ramayan, the Mahabharat, the Kumarsambhav, the Sakuntala, the Panini, the Katyayan, the Sankhya, the Patanjal, the Vedanta, the Vaisheshik, all—all these were the immortal productions of the Hindoos! What contemptible things were those dolls in comparison thereto? Then I thought, that the ends of this human existence were rightly attained in my birth amongst the races of the Hindoos.

There was, at the foot of Mount Lalitgiri, and carved out of its body, a grotto by the name of Hastigumpha. But wherefore should I apply "was"? Are the limbs of a mountain subject to decay? Oh! certainly. Time proves destructive of all; and the cave is no longer in existence. Its roof has collapsed, the pillars have tumbled down, the floor has been overgrown with grass,—everything has been destroyed. But no use bewailing the loss of the cave.

The cave, however, was a very beautiful one. The pillars and the walls, carved out of the body of the mountain, were quite charming. The spot was ever adorned with beautiful statues. A few of them remain down to this time. But they have been affected with damp; their colours have died out; perhaps the nose of the one has been broken, or the hand of the other, or else the leg of the third. Even the images have been maimed and mutilated like the Hindoos of the present age.

To such a plight has the cave been reduced now. During the time, to which I allude, 'twas not so. The cave was perfect; and inside it, dwelt the greatest of all hermits—the high-souled Gangadhar Swami.

In due time, the Bhairabi made her appearance there accompanied by Sree. She saw, that Gangadhar Swami was perfectly absorbed in meditation. Without, therefore, disturbing him, they lay down in one extremity of the cave and spent the night.

Breaking his contemplation very early next morning, Gangadhar Swami rose and, bathing in the waters of the Virupa, performed his matinal duties. On his re-entering the grotto, the Bhairabi made her obeisance to him and took the dust of his feet. Sree followed suit.

Gangadhar Swami spoke not to Sree. Nor did he ask any question to the Bhairabi relating to her. He talked to the Bhairabi alone. Unhappily the colloquy was held all in Sanskrit, and Sree could not comprehend a syllable of it. Those words, however, that need be brought to the notice of our readers, we will record as rendered into English.

Gangadhar Swami asked:—"Who is this woman?"

The Bhairabi returned:—"A wayfarer."

Gangadhar Swami again questioned:—"What has brought her hither?"

The Bhairabi replied :—"She has been a little puzzled with her own destiny. Pray explain the thing to her, according to religious doctrines."

Sree now advanced up to the spot, where Gangadhar Swami was seated, and again bowed to him. The Swami then looked her in the face and said in Hindi :—"Thou bearest Cancer sign of the zodiac—dost thou not? Thou wast born when the Moon was merged into the star Pooshya."

Sree remained speechless. The Swami said :—"Emerge from the cave, I'll examine thy palm."

Then conducting Sree out of the cave, the Swami observed the marks and lines of the palm of her left hand. By a certain process of calculation, he ascertained the date of her birth as also the year, the lunar day, the *danda*,* the *pala*† and other facts. Then casting the nativity he placed the twelve planets, in their proper places, with the help of an ancient almanac, written on palm leaves, which he had in the cave. Then he said to Sree :—"The full Moon was in its own chamber at the moment of thy birth, and, in the seventh, there was the three propitious planets of Mars, Asteroids and Jupiter. Wherefore art thou dressed out as a *sannyasini*, my child—thou, who art a queen?"

Sree replied :—"I'm told, that my husband has been crowned a king. But I have not seen him so elevated."

The Swami returned :—"Yes, yes; 'tis not for thee to see him so placed. Here Asteroid, in the seventh, is below; and the propitious planets, being in the chamber of the unpropitious ones, have themselves become so. Thou art not destined for a diadem."

To Sree, these things were quite a jargon, and she remained silent. After a while she broke the silence and said—"Do you mark any other misfortune, Sir?"

The Swami replied :—"The Moon is within thirty degrees of Saturn."

Sree rejoined :—"What's the result, foreshadowed by such a casualty."

---

* A division of time equal to about 24 minutes.
† One sixtieth part of a *danda*.

The Swami answered :—" Thou shalt, be the cause of thy ' dear one's' death."

Sree sprang up and was darting away. The Swami beckoned her and said :—" Wait a bit. Thou art destined for some deed of the greatest piety. But the time for it has not yet arrived. When the time comes, go and pay a visit to thy husband."

Sree queried :—" When will the time arrive ? "

The response of the Swami was :—" I cannot say that at present ; it requires a vast deal of calculation ; and the time, too, is not close. What place art thou bound to ?

Sree observed :—" I'm resolved upon visiting Purushottam * "

The Swami said :—" Go. On another occasion—say the next year—come to me, and I will ascertain the time and tell thee."

The Swami then addressed the Bhairabi and said :—" You, too, should come."

He, then, shut himself up again into silence and relapsed into his meditation. The Bhairabis, thereupon, made their obeisance to him and emerged from the cave.

* The temple of Jagannath at Puri in Orissa.

CHAPTER XIX

Again did the two Bhairabis sally forth on their way to Purushottam, illuminating the high road to Orissa. The *Oriahs* stood agape in lines on the way, and fixed their gaze on the two—so much absorbed were they in admiration. One of them advanced and fell at the feet of the twins on his full length and said :—" Pray, place your feet on my head." Another said :—" Out of mercy, tarry a moment and listen to the story of my woes." Cheering everybody with befitting replies, the beautiful twins continued their journey.

With a view to curbing the progress of the rapidly proceeding Sree a little, the Bhairabi said —" Slowly, sister ! move a little slowly. Can you go ahead of your destiny by hastening on at such a rate ? "

The tender address soothed Sree's soul a little. Being in the company of the Bhairabi for these two days, Sree had already conceived a certain amount of love for her. For these two days, conversation was held on in terms respectful, because the Bhairabi was an object of Sree's worship. Now, however, that the Bhairabi had changed that mode of address, Sree saw, that her companion also had conceived a liking for her. Sree relaxed her paces.

The Bhairabi said :—" Respectful addresses do not do any longer. We are both of the same age. Let us treat each other as sister."

Sree enquired :—" Have you, too, quitted the domestic sphere in consequence of misery? "

The Bhairabi returned :—" I have neither happiness, nor misery. Such is not destiny. I purpose hearing the tale of your woes ; but that is not a matter for the present. Your name even has not yet been ascertained. By what name I am to call you ?

Sree said :—"My names Sree. By what name shall I address you ? The other day you said, you were not a Bhairabi in the accepted sense of the term. What are you then ?"

The Bhairabi replied :—" I am a Vaisnavi. But I do not belong to the company of the *Nerahs*."*

Sree questioned :—" What other sorts of Vaisnavis there are ? Vaisnavis never deck themselves out like this !"

The Bhairabi responded :—" You will come to know all these mysteries in time. For the nonce, you know me for a Vaisnavi. My name's Yayanti ; you may call me by the name. Now, then, you've heard what the Swami said. Perhaps you have no mind to re-enter the world. On the other hand, there's nothing to beguile the time with. Have you ever devoted a thought to what you will adopt to kill the days with ?"

Sree answered :—" No, I've never thought of that. But such a long time has, surely, been whiled away !"

Yayanti asked :—" How ?"

Sree's reply was :—" In extreme misery. It seems such a type of misery is unknown in this world."

Yayanti said :—" There's a remedy for it—Devote your mind to something else."

Sree asked :—" To what am I to devote my mind ?"

Yayanti answered :—" In this wide world, do you mean to say there's nothing to occupy the mind with ?"

Sree :—Vice ?

Yayanti :—No, piety.

Sree :—Woman's only piety is the worship of her lord. And when I have fled from that, what other piety is left for me ?

Yayanti :—There's a Lord of the lord.

Sree :—He may be the Lord of my lord, but not mine. My lord is my only Lord and none else.

Yayanti :—He, who is the Lord of your lord, is your Lord likewise, because He is the Lord of everybody.

Sree :—I know not God even, but know my husband.

Yayanti :—Do you like to know Him ? Your miseries shall come to an end if you know Him.

Sree :—Oh ! no. I do not want God, if it requires me to banish

* The followers of Gouranga. Of this sect, the men generally shave their heads clean. Hence they are called *Nerahs*, meaning having heads without hair.—S. C. M.

my husband from my mind. Of the misery, consequent on my flying from my husband, and the happiness, arising out of the possession of the knowledge of God, I prefer the former.

Yayanti :—Wherefore. then, did you leave him in spite of such a love ?

Sree :—Haven't you listened to what is foreshadowed by my horoscope ? I had heard it.

Yayanti :—What led you to conceive such a love ?

Sree then briefly narrated her earlier history. It started the tears in Yayanti's eyes. The latter said :—" Well, you may be said not to have met him at all. What led you to feel such a flame ?

Sree :—Ah ! you love God. How often do you meet Him ?

Yayanti :—But I contemplate Him day and night.

Sree :—When in my girl-hood did he repudiate me, from that day, have I also contemplated him day and night.

Yayanti's flesh crept.

Sree then continued :—" Had I been permitted to be associated with him in domesticity, methinks it would have proved widely different. Man is an embodiment of virtues and vices. He, too, might have his vices, or my own shortcomings would have sharpened my eyes to find out failings on his part where there were none in reality. This would certainly have resulted in the exchange of words, estrangement of each other's heart and ultimate want of peace. Such being the case, the flame of blighted hopes, now burning in my bosom, would never have burnt thus. For these livelong years have I made an ideal image of, and worshipped, him. Having rubbed out sandal juice and painted the walls with it, have I lulled myself into the belief, that I have painted his body. Having stolen flowers from this park and that, with utmost care, have I finished chaplets, with them, after my choice, to the exclusion of all other duties, and having suspended them to the branches of trees, bedecked with flowers, have I equally laid the flattering unction on my soul, that I have put them round his neck. Having sold off all my ornaments, have I got and cooked the best of eatables, with the proceeds, and having abandoned them to the tides of the river, have I contented myself, that I have fed him with them. On no occasion, when making my obeisance to the idols, have I been convinced of

the fact, that I was bowing before the Gods, but invariably have I seen his feet near my head. Then—after all these, Yayanti, I have left him ; he called me, yet I have fled from him !"

Sree's further utterances were choked, and burying her countenance in the crumpled-up end of her drapery, she wept to her heart's composure.

Tears also trembled on the eye-lashes of Yayanti. Is such a Bhairabi a Bhairabi ?

END OF THE FIRST PART

SITARAM

PART II.

THE EVENING—THE BHAIRABI

SITARAM

PART II.

THE EVENING : THE BHAIRABI

CHAPTER I.

It proved very difficult for Sitaram to found his Hindoo dominion, because his mind was now weaned away from it. He would have succeeded in his endeavours, if the whole of his mind had been occupied with the thought of the Hindoo rule. But, beginning with a little bit, Sree had gradually usurped his heart in its entirety. Had she been in his society—had she lived like a queen in the palace and succoured her husband in the discharge of his regal duties—in that case she could not have been assigned a place, better than a well-beloved queen is expected to secure in the heart of a crowned head. But her absence had produced a quite different effect. Particularly, Sree was abandoned—she had adopted the hermitage. Ten to one, to keep breath in a living skeleton she had been compelled to take to beggary, or else, had died. These were the thoughts that had secured for her the largest portion of Sitaram's heart. Commencing her conquest with the minutest portion, Sree had conquered the whole of Sitaram's heart, and there was no room for the Hindoo dominion. Necessarily the establishment of the monarchy got involved into a vast amount of difficulty. The absence of Sree had deprived Sitaram's mind of all its pleasures. He now felt no pleasure in his diadem, no pleasure in the foundation of the mon

archy. As a matter of course, the establishment of the kingdom became a matter of extreme difficulty.

From the very outset, Sitaram had instituted various investigations into the where-abouts of Sree. Months and months, years after years had elapsed. For these years had Sitaram persisted in his enquiries. At all the shrines, in all the towns, had he sent his emissaries to cause the searches to be made. But to no purpose. Other people might not have known Sree and, as such, could not have searched her out. This doubt had induced Sitaram to give Gangaram leave from the public office and to employ him on this errand. Gangaram had travelled over a good many localities. But frustrated he had come back.

Sitaram now determined to give the Hindoo dominion over to the tides. He thought of himself making the search in every place of pilgrimage and in every town. If he got Sree he would come back and assume reins of the monarchy. Otherwise he would renounce the world and become an ascetic. He thought :—"Owing to the restless state of my mind, I am not fit to discharge these regal duties. To be concerned in them is simply to be a source of popular oppression. I will, therefore, instal my son by Nanda a king, and leaving the government of the kingdom, in the hands of Chandrachoorh and Nanda, will I leave the worldly sphere."

These things, however, did Sitaram keep in the innermost recesses of his own heart. He never suffered anybody to know them. The searches he had caused for Sree were alike private. Except those actually concerned in them, nobody ever knew, that such searches had been made.

These facts might or might not be known to others. But that he was himself no longer, was seen both by Nanda and Rama. Perceiving therefore, this state of her husband's mind, Nanda endeavoured her best, to divert Sitaram, by justly performing the duties of a queen. And on more occasions than one was she successful. But Rama always remained pensive and morose at the inattention and neglect of her husband—a fact, which proved productive of greater displeasure for Sitaram. Rama thought :—"How is it, that my lord does not love me now-a-days ?" Nanda said unto herself—"Let him love me or not as he chooses, but may the Gods

ordain that there be no failing on my part. That alone will render me happy."

At last Sitaram disclosed to his two wives, to Chandrachoorh and to his other courtiers, that, till then, he was not a king, in as much as the Emperor of Delhi had not granted him a *sanad*. He therefore proposed to go to Delhi, for the purpose of getting the *sanad*, without delay.

The moment was highly unfavorable. True, that in Mahammadpur itself Sitaram's sway was indisputably established. Even the irate Torab Khan himself had not raised the standard of revolt. And it had a special reason. The satrapy of Bengal was then under Moorsidcooly Khan, who, belonging to the race of the Hindoos, had become a vicious Mahamedan. Bengal was yet under the paramount power at Delhi, and Torab Khan was a deputy of the Emperor, upon whom he had brought a certain amount of influence to bear. But he did not stand well with the Subadar. What should the Subadar say, if, by hook or by crook, he ruined Sitaram? The Subadar might say :—"This man is innocent. Without the slightest excuse, he pays government revenue in due time and does not run outstanding accounts. Wherefore thus oppress him?" And Moorsidcooly Khan might involve the Fauzdar into difficulties. In order, therefore, to ascertain the Subadar's mind, Torab Khan sent a detailed account of Sitaram's movements. Moorsidcooly Khan was the cunningest of all the cunning. He thought it was the best opportunity to depose Torab Khan. If Torab Khan suppressed Sitaram, he would call for an explanation from the Fauzdar, why he had ruined an innocent man? If he did not, in that event, too, would the Subadar turn round and want to know why the Fauzdar had suffered a rebellious infidel to escape unpunished? He, therefore, held his peace to see what steps would the Fauzdar adopt. And Moorsidcooly Khan did not reply to Torab's letter, and the latter, too, could not, as a matter of fact, do anything.

A long time, however, was not allowed to pass thus tranquilly.

* Owing to the ignorance of European historians, Seraj-ud-dowla is depicted as a vicious, and Moorsidcooly Khan a pious, ruler.

For the Hindooism of the Hindoos was up-rearing its head higher and higher every day. This became quite intolerable to the Mahamedans. Mahammadpur itself was studded with high temples, and with the excitement, consequent on their establishment, the whole of that part of the country was agitated. Moreover, at this time, the wretched and highly vicious Moorsidcooly Khan being at the helm of the affairs of government, there was no end of oppression in all other parts of Bengal—such type of tyranny is not recorded in any portion of history. Moorsidcooly Khan was told, that everywhere the Hindoos were rolling in dust. 'Twas only in Mahammadpur, that they were flourishing. He, thereupon, sent an order for Sitaram's destruction.

Accordingly, preparations were commenced in Bhusana, for the destruction of Sitaram. But the preparations could not be complete, as soon as the order was given. Because Moorsidcooly Khan had only sent the order for Sitaram's destruction, but not an army. Nevertheless, it was no act of injustice to Torab Khan, on the part of the Subadar—he never suffered anything of injustice to be done to Mahamedans. It was the practice of that time, that whatever was to be done for the preservation of public peace should be done by the Fauzdar, out of his own private purse; without cogent reasons, the Nawab's force would not come to his aid. To punish one of the Zemindars was regarded as an act, falling within the category of the preservation of public peace, and as such, the Nawab had not sent an army. On his side, did the Fauzdar calculate, that inasmuch as Sitaram Ray had trained all the male adults, in his dominion, in martial discipline, it did not seem prudent to invade Mahammadpur, with the few hundreds of sepoys, he could muster. He therefore determined to increase the number of his soldiers. But that was a thing, not to be accomplished in a day or two. Particularly, he was an up-country Mahamedan, and as to the martial abilities of the natives of Bengal, he was highly sceptical. He, therefore, employed agents to recruit well-trained Rajputs and Beharis for his army. Necessarily he had to abstain from marching upon the destruction of Sitaram, till he attained the proper force. This caused a delay. In the meantime, things went on as usual.

In strict privacy was Torab Khan executing all these preparations. He was bent upon taking Sitaram by surprise. But everything came to the latter's knowledge. The astute Chandrachoorh knew it for certain, that a kingdom could not be administered, without the services of secret spies—Ram Chandra had got his Durmukh. Chandrachoorh, too, had a spy in the heart of Bhusana itself. Consequently, the fact of the order having been received from Moorsidábad, for the destruction of Sitaram together with his capital, became known to Chandrachoorh and was alike made known to Sitaram. Unfortunately, just at this moment, Sitaram made the proposal to go to Delhi.

However unfavorable the hour might be, the sharpwitted Chandrachoorh, did not give his dissent to Sitaram's proposal. He said :—" Victory or defeat in an engagement depends on the will of the Almighty. Take it for granted, that fighting at the stake of our own lives, we defeat the Fauzdar. But does it ensure our security ? The defeat of the Fauzdar will bring the Subadar into the arena, and the overthrow of the Subadar, the Emperor. Such being the fact, it is not at all lucky, that the battle should take place. Nothing can lull us into the belief, that we will succeed in vanquishing the Nawab of Moorsidabad or the Emperor of Delhi. The *sanad*, therefore, of the Emperor is the proper remedy. Should the paramount power at Delhi assign to you the dominion of these *pergunnahs* neither the Fauzdar nor the Nawab would dare invade it. The establishment of a Hindoo rule is not a matter, to be achieved in a day, or in a generation's time—nor was the Mogul dominion established as quickly. This is the very foundation ; and an ill-feeling with the Subadar of Bengal, or the Emperor of Delhi, at the very outset, will mar everything. Our proceedings ought, therefore, to be wary in the extreme. I do not see any other remedy but a *sanad* from the Supreme Government. You had better start for Delhi directly. A little expense there and the thing will be managed. Now-a-days all the Omrahs of Delhi—not excepting the Emperor himself—are ready to sell their skin for money. And a clever man like yourself will be able easily to manage the affair. If, in the meantime, the Mahamedans invade Mahammadpur, then Mrinmaya can cope with them—I think I may safely venture to

expect this much. Mrinmaya is very skilful in military occupations and courageous to the backbone. And I do not advise you to depend on his prowess and heroism alone. I have good reason for cherishing the hope, that I shall be in a position to keep the Mahamedans off by persuasions. You may, therefore, without any cause for alarm, depend upon me for a couple of months or so. Many a stroke of State policy is known to me."

Sitaram was mightily pleased to hear this, and with the necessary funds and a few escorts, he started for Delhi immediately. It was generally believed that he was going to Delhi. But where he was going in reality was known to nobody save himself.

At his departure Sitaram entrusted the management of the kingdom to Chandrachoorh, Mrinmaya and Gangaram. Ministerial duties and the duties of the treasury, he delegated to Chandrachoorh, and Mrinmaya, he placed at the head of the army. The duties of the mayoralty of the capital, he entrusted to Gangaram, and employed Nanda, to look after the affairs of the female apartments. For fear of her cryings and weepings, Sitaram did not take his leave of Rama. As a matter of course, Rama flooded the country with her tears.

CHAPTER II.

Having wept her grief off to a certain extent, Rama called her scattered ideas to look the situation calmy in the face. Addle-pated as she was, she saw, that it was well, that Sitaram had started for Delhi at the time. If the Mahamedans invaded Mahammadpur, and killed everybody, Sitaram, at least, would be safe. What, therefore, was the chief cause for Rama's fear, was removed. It was of no consequence, if Rama died. Perhaps they would pierce her to death with their spears, or cut her into mince-meat with their cutlasses, or would shoot her with their guns, or else, catching her by the knot, in which her hair was confined behind her head, they would hurl her down from the terrace. "Well," thought she, "let'em do whatever they choose, it matters not for me. At all events Sitaram will be safe and sound at Delhi." So it was very well after all. The only thing was, that Rana would not have any more opportunity to meet him. "Oh, that be hanged! I shall meet him in the next world. Why, now-a-days in Mahammadpur itself such meetings are rare!—Oh, never mind, so long as Sitaram is well, I can't fear anything else!"

Had it been a year ago, then Rama might have been satisfied with this cogitation. But she was not destined for a peaceful existence. About a year ago, she had got a child. It was the features of this child, that had ennerved her to tolerate the neglect of Sitaram. First of all, Rama thought of Sitaram and shook off her fear. Then she thought of her own self and became prepared to die. Then she thought of her child—what was to be done in respect to the infant? "Should I die," thought she, "or should they kill me, who is to nurse my child? Never mind! I'll make my baby over to the care of my co-wife. But does a step-mother ever take care of her step-son? By-the-bye, should the Mahamedans kill me, would they

spare my co-wife ? She is certainly not Pir !* So my co-wife's fate is alike sealed. To whom then to entrust the child ?"

While thus musing, it seemed to Rama, as if she had been struck by the lightning. Something terrible flashed across her mind,—"Shall the Mahamedans spare the child itself?" Good Heavens ! What was Rama thinking till now ? The Mahamedans were robbers, savages, beaf-eaters, enemies. Should they spare the infant? Horror of horrors ! Wherefore had Sitaram gone to Delhi ? To whom to apply for an explanation of the thing ? And how to carry the burthen of the frame, with such a doubt in mind ? She therefore sought what explanation had Nanda to give her.

Meeting the latter Rama said :—" Well, sister ! I'm very much affrighted. Wherefore has the king gone to Delhi ?"

Nanda returned :—" The duties of a king are known to a king alone. What can we know of them my dear ?"

Rama added :—" Well, should the Mahamedans appear at this moment, who will protect the palace ?"

Nanda's response was :—" The Almighty ! Who else would protect it, should He refuse to do so ?"

Rama again questioned :—" Well, do the Mahamedans make an indiscriminate slaughter ?"

Nanda replied :—" Does an enemy ever show mercy ?"

Rama rejoined :—" Well, then, let'em kill us. But will they not be moved to show mercy to children ?"

Nanda answered :—" Why seek to meet misfortune half way, dearest sister ! Whatever the Almighty hath ordained in respect to us must come to pass. If the divine decree be for our good, then good shall surely be the result. We have never been guilty of any transgression. Wherefore should things go amiss with us ? Why get yourself exhausted with cares like these ? Will you play at the *pasha*.† Come, I'll win the new pendant of your *nath*."‡

With a view therefore to divert Rama's attention, Nanda procured the *pasha* ; and not able to avoid it, Rama played a game. But she could not enter heart and soul into the play. Nanda suffered herself

* A saint held in great veneration amongst the followers of Islam.—S. C. M.
† A Indian indoor game played with the toss of short ivory sticks.—S. C. M.
‡ A large nose-ring, with pendant of pearl &c.—S. C. M.

to be the loser. Accordingly Rama's pendant was saved. But she refused to give her co-wife her revenge. With the conclusion of the first game Rama started up. Rama had not got the desired answer to her question from Nanda, and so she had no heart to play. Returning into her own suite of apartments, she questioned one of her maids, who was somewhat advanced in age. "Well my good woman," asked she, "do the Mahamedans kill children?"

The old woman said in reply:—"Whom do they *not* kill? They are in the habit of eating beaf—of saying the nemaz.* Do you think they spare children?"

Rama's heart now began to palpilate. She then began to ask the same question to everybody, she ran against—from the infant up to the decrepit, residing in the castle. Every body stood in terror of the Mahamedans; none saw them in unbiassed eyes. All of them, therefore, vouchsafed answers, similar to that of the old maidservant. Rama now approached her bed and with the child in her arms, she lay down and began to shed bitter and scalding tears.

* Mahamedan prayer.—S. C. M.

CHAPTER III.

In the mean time, report reached the ears of Torab Khan that Sitaram had left Mahammadpur for Delhi. He thought it was the best opportunity. He would avail himself of that moment to reduce Mahommadpur to ashes. He, therefore, commenced preparations to invade Sitaram's capital.

The news reached Mahammadpur as usual and gave rise to a great commotion in the capital. Whole families now began to take to flight—some to the house of a mother's sister, some to that of a father's sister. Some removed to a father's brother's—some to a mother's brother's. Some to a father-in-law's, while others to a son-in-law's, abode. Some to a child's father-in-law's, and others to a sister's husband's, house. In fact, in this way, a number of families packed themselves off, bag and baggage, from the town. The shopkeepers left their shops, the bankers, their counters, the merchants, their farms. Artisans too, gave themselves the move with all their implements. Thus there arose a great disorder in the town.

Gangaram Dass was the lord Mayor. To take Chandrachoorh's advice he now called and said :—"What's your counsel now, Reverend Sir ? The town is about to fall to pieces."

Chandrachoorh replied :—"Of women, children and the old let them fly who like ; do not prevent them—rather it is necessary. Avert it Heaven, should Torab Khan besiege the fortress with his army in that case, the less the number of people to provide for, the better. Because, in that case, we may be in a position to hold on for some time. But do not allow any of those, that have been trained in warfare, to depart. Should any one of such people go out, you shall instantly order him to be shot dead. Of weapons, see that not a single blade is taken out and a single handful of grain should not allowed to pass out."

Then called Mrinmay, the commanding officer. And, after making his obeisance to the venerable Chandrachoorh, he said :—"Why should we be cooped up here to die sure deaths? If really Torab Khan be advancing, why should we not go to meet him half-way and kill him ?"

Chandrachoorh's answer was :—"Why resign the assistance of this powerful stream? Should you be defeated in the way, in that case, we would be quite done for. Whereas, if you only have a number of cannons, placed on this side, ready to be used, who dares cross it? It is a river, not to be waded across. Rather cause the news to be brought in, where the Mahamedan force cross the stream, and march you and confront them there. In that case, they will be prevented from crossing the river. Get everything ready, but depart not without my knowledge."

Chandrachoorh was awaiting the return of his spy. He was expecting the information, where the Mahamedan army would cross the river, on the return of his confidential emissary, in order to decide upon the particular course, he would adopt.

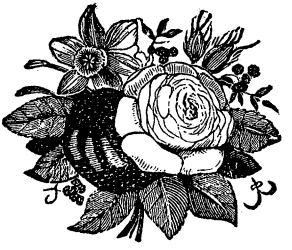
On the other hand, the report found its way into the inner apartment of the castle, that Torab Khan was advancing with his army to plunder and pillage Mahammadpur. Reports generally reach the ears of the inmates of the female apartment in a rather garbled form. Where the men would take the expression "coming" for "making preparations," the gentler sex would attach to it the interpretation, "have almost reached." Accordingly there arose a a great uproar, arising out of cries and so forth. Nanda's occupations now were increased manifold. All unaided as she was, how could she cope with the task of soothing and consoling everybody? Specially, was she very much occupied with the nursing of Rama. For at every moment, was Rama sinking off into swoons. Nanda thought within herself:—"Co-wife as she is, her death would, of a verity, remove a thorn from my side. But since my lord has entrusted the charge of this branch of the household to me, I must save her, even at the peril of my own life." And Nanda addressed herself to the tending of Rama to the exclusion of all other duties.

The females of the household now approached Nanda in a body and, in way of counsel, said :—"O mother! you do one thing and

save the life of one all. Surrender the kingdom to the Mahamedans without fight and ask for the grant of everybody's life. We are certainly the natives of Bengal. What business have we in fights and quarrels, mother? Once our lives are out of danger, everything shall come in due course. You are the custodian of the life every one of us. We'll live to bless you—you only do as we say."

Nanda replied:—" Well cheer up, my good people! Do you mean to say, you are more sensible than the men? Why do you fear in spite of their assurance, that there's no possible cause for alarm? Are they reckless of their own lives, or of ours, either?"

After this colloquy Rama did not swoon any more, and she rose to a sitting posture. What inspired her with courage will be the subject of the next chapter.



CHAPTER IV

Gangaram was the Mayor of Mahammadpur. Now-a-days, he was very busy with his night patrols. The day, on which the scene, embodied in the previous chapter, was enacted, was followed by night, and he was patrolling the town with a view to ascertain its precise condition, on foot and in the commonest garb imaginable. Being tired, he was making his way back into his own quarters, towards the dawn, when somebody dragged him by his clothes from behind.

Gangaram turned round and saw a woman. The night was dark—the street was almost lonely, barring the presence of that woman alone. Although the atmosphere was enveloped in darkness, yet from the features as well as the garb of the individual, Gangaram knew her to be a woman, but nothing more. Gangaram asked :—"Who art thou ?"

The woman replied :—"Never mind me. Only ask me what I want."

From her voice, Gangaram saw, that his companion was not far advanced in years. But the voice was rather commanding. Gangaram said :—"Well, reserve thy say, then, if thou likest. First, tell me, wherefore art thou lounging about in the street alone and in this hour of the night, woman that thou art ? Dost thou not know, what a perilous time we live in ?

The woman responded :—"In this hour of the night and alone, I am doing nothing other than looking for you."

"Stuff and nonsense" was Gangaram's reply. "In the first place," he went on "thou dost not know who I am."

The woman :—I know, that you are the worthy Dass—the Lord Mayor.

Ganga :—Well, after all, I see that thou knowest me, indeed. But talking of the possibility of meeting me, what led you to believe, that you would come in contact with me exactly on this spot? For I myself was not sure of popping into this alley!

The woman :—For a long time I have been searching for you —have looked into your own house, too.

Ganga :—And why?

The woman :—That's what you should have ascertained first. Now, then, can you perform something very daring?

Ganga :—What? Am I to jump off the roof, or to eat fire—eh?

The woman :—Something more perilous than either. Are you prepared to accompany me this moment, whithersoever I may lead you?

Ganga :—Who art thou? and where am I to go?

The woman :—That I am not going to tell you, nor will you have any right to ask me. Now, then, are you man enough?

Ganga :—Very well, thou mayst not disclose that. But, answer me a few questions—What's thy name? Who thou art? What's thy occupation? and, What is needed of me?

The woman .—My name's Moorala. Beyond that I'll tell you nothing. If you lack in courage, you are at liberty to withdraw. But since you are so very chicken-hearted, how dare you protect the kingdom from the Mahamedans? Do you not venture to go, without so much prating, where I can go—I, who am a woman?

As a matter of course, Gangaram could not but follow Moorala. Moorala went on with Gangaram at her heels. After making a certain distance, Gangaram saw an immense building in front. He recognized it and said :—"Why, thou must be getting into the palace!

Moorala :—What's the harm?

Ganga :—None, indeed, if we only had admittance by the main entrance. But here are we at the back door. Do you mean to lead me into the inner apartment?

Moorala :—Haven't you courage enough?

Ganga :—No, I dare not. It is my master's zenana. Without permission, therefore, I can't enter it.

Moorala :—Well, then, whose permission do you want ?

Ganga :—The king's.

Moorala :—But he is away at this moment. Will the permission of the queen do ?

Ganga :—To be sure !

" Follow me," said Moorala " and I'll procure you the permission of the queen."

Ganga :—But why should the guard on watch allow thee to enter ?

Moorala :—He shall.

Ganga :—But unless he recognizes me, he will not pass me ; and, in the present condition, I do not like to be recognized.

Moorala :—And you need not be recognized at all. Mind I am conducting you.

A guard was on duty at the gate. Moorala came up to him and asked :—" Now, then, worthy *Pande* ! have you left the get unlocked ? "

The man replied :—" Yes, I have. But who is this man ? " he asked, turning towards Gangaram.

" He's my brother " answered Moorala.

The guard :—Well, there's no order for passing men.

Foaming and fuming, Moorala now replied :—" Pooh ! whose order is wanted, wretch ? Whose order do you want ? Except that of mine, whose order you seek ? Know you not, that by the strokes of a broom, I will remove all the hair of your beard ?

The guard was staggered, and he remained speechless.

Then accompanied by Gangaram, Moorala entered the mansion without any opposition. They then ascendeed to the second storey. Here Moorala pointed out a door to Gangaram and said :—" Pray enter the room. I will remain close by, but will not get inside.

Driven by curiosity, Gangaram entered the chamber and saw, is was fitted up with the costliest of furniture procurable. Seated on a silver bedstead was a lady. The mellowed light of the lamp fell upon her down-cast countenance. She was in the sole companionship of her own reflection in the room. Gangaram imagined, such type of beauty never drew breath. The lady was Rama.

CHAPTER V

Gangaram had never entered Sitaram's zenna—had never seen either Nanda or Rama. But from the richest appointment of the chamber, he concluded, that the lady was one of the two queens. Of the two consorts of the king, the fame of Rama, as possessing great personal charms, was greater, and naturally Gangaram took the present occupant of the apartment to be the younger queen. He, therefore, enquired :—"Has your Highness summoned me ?"

Rama started up, bowed to Gangaram and then said :—"You are a brother to me—an elder brother. Treat me just in the same way as you would treat Sree. Pray, therefore, do not think the worse of me, because of my having summoned you at such an unseemly hour.

Ganga :—I am bound to attened, whenever your Highness orders me—'tis you, who are the mistress—

Rama :—Moorala says, you dare not come publicly. She moreover says—or what shall I speak of the thousand and one things, the shameless wench says ? However, my dear worthy brother ! greatly terrified, I have committed this most daring of all deeds. You save me."

While thus speaking, Rama burst in to an agony of tears. Gangaram was touched to see her weeping. He said :—"Well, what's the matter ? What's to be done ?"

"What's the matter ?" echoed Rama. "Don't you know", she continued, "that the Mahamedans are coming to plunder and pillage the kingdom, and killing us, one and all, they will set fire to the capital ?"

Ganga :—Who has terrified you ? For what earthly use do

we exist, if the Mahamedans are suffered to come and burn the capital? Wherefore are we provided with our daily bread by you?

Rama :—You, men, are very daring, You do not see things in their proper light. If you fail to protect us, then what will be the result?

And again she burst into tears.

Gangaram said :—"To the best of our ability, will we protect you, and you need not be alarmed."

Rama :—I dare say you will. But should you fail—

Ganga :—In that case, we will lay down our lives.

Rama :—Do not do that. Listen to me. To-day a proposal was made to the elder queen to the effect, that she should get the Mahamedans invited here, and the domain made over to them in return for everybody's life. But she did not listen to it—she is not sensible enough. That's why I have summoned you. Now, then, is that not practicable?

Ganga :—What do you want me to do?

Rama :—There, take all my ornaments and jewelleries! All my wealth I am prepared to give you; you take everything. Only without speaking anything to anybody, you see the Mahamedans and tell them, that we are ready to give the dominion and the town to them. Only let them promise, that they will not kill anybody. Should they agree to the proposal, then, the town being in your charge, you have simply to conduct them secretly and make the fort over to them. By so doing, everybody will be safe.

Gangaram shuddered to hear this and said :—"Your Highness! whatever you have said to me cannot be recalled. But do not give utterance to any such thing before anybody else. Such a thing from me? O God! that can never be, even if my own life were jeopardized. On the other hand, should anybody do such a thing, I myself will behead him."

Rama's last hope was now scattered to the wind and she cried outright, saying :—"What, then, will become of my darling?"

Gangaram grew alarmed and said :—"For Heaven's sake compose yourself! Should your cries attract anybody here, then, it would go very hard with both of us. 'Tis for your child, that you seem so

much solicitous. And I promise, I will make some arrangement for its safety. Are you ready to remove from this place ?

Rama :—If you undertake to conduct me to the house of my father, then I am. But, then, neither the elder queen nor the revered Preceptor will allow me to move from here.

Ganga :—In such a case, you shall have to go stealthily. But that is not needed at present. Should danger present itself, then I will call and escort you thither.

Rama :—How am I to get the information ?

Ganga :—Send Moorala for it. But let her go to me in extreme privacy.

Rama now breathed more freely ; and trembling, she said :—You've given me my life, as it were. Henceforward I will live to adore you. May the gods bless you."

Thus speaking, Rama dismissed Gangaram from her presence, and Moorala conducted him out of the house.

There was nothing, savouring of guilt, in the mind of either of the two. Yet the proceeding had become highly indiscreet. Both Rama and Gangaram perceived it. Gangaram thought :—"In what respect am I guilty ?" Rama said unto herself :—"What alternative is left to me ? My very life is jeopardized !" Only Moorala rejoiced.

Had Gangaram been endowed with a vision, a little clearer than he had, he would surely have found out, that somebody else was behind the screen. He was not a human being, but one,

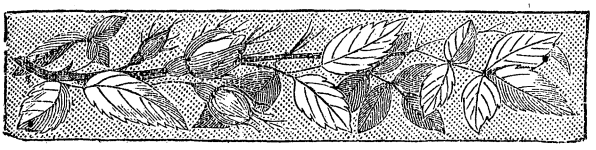
Whose fist the corner of his right eye touch'd ;
Depress'd shoulder, left leg bent as a rest.
In whose dexterous hand, the floral arch
Reduc'd to disc, to shoot the self-born god.

On the other hand, what is longed for by man is granted by Heaven. The worshipful Chandrachoorh despatched his emissary to Torab Khan to say, that he was prepared to sell the kingdom together with its arsenals and magazines, to the Mahamedans, and he wanted to know, what price they would give ? The venerable gentleman further pointed out the utter inutility of a battle, and he asked them to take the dominion for a price.

Chandrachoorh then communicated the step, thus adopted, to

Mrinmaya and Gangaram. Mrinmaya lost his temper and vociferated ? :—" Dare you say so ?"

Chandrachoorh replied :—" Are you absolutely devoid of sense, fool, that you are ? In settling the price, at least a couple of months may elapse, and the king may return in the interval." What Gangaram thought is not precisely known to us. But certain it is, that he kept his own counsel.



CHAPTER VI.

So, Gangaram could not follow his usual pursuits that day. The features of Rama were grandly beautiful! What beautiful rays of light had been playing upon them! These were the thoughts, that occupied him all the day long. "Was it" he thought, "because of the countenance having been seen in a candle-light? If so, why not women sit before lighted wax-tapers, day and night? What tressess of hair of the liveliest black! What complexion! What a pair of eye-brows! What eyes! What lips—thin as well as cherry-like! What a shape!" On what would Gangaram fix his mind? Every particular of her charms was preter-angelic. Gangaram thought:—"I had no imagination of such type of beauty being possessed by mortals. The ends of my birth have been attained, in my having feasted my eyes upon those charms. Their memory will enliven the remaining days of my existence."

Is it ever possible—fool, that thou art? One, smitten at the first meeting naturally longs to have another. At mid-day, Gangaram thought:—"I'll be able to while away the remainder of my days happily, by dwelling upon the memory of my first meeting." But at dusk, he said unto himself:—"May I not have another opportunity to meet her?" At candle-light, he exclaimed:—"Oh! for a call from Moorala again to-night!" At about 9 o'clock in the evening, Moorala again arrested him in a secluded spot.

Gangaram asked:—"Well, what's the news?

Moorala:—What's your news?

Gangaram:—What news you want?

Moorala:—That of going over to father's house.

Gangaram:—I do not think 'twill be necessary—the kingdom will be saved.

Moorala :—How have you ascertained that ?

" That can't be divulged before you " replied Gangaram.

Moorala :—Then I ommunicate this report ?

Gangaram :—Do so.

Moorala :—If she sends me again ?

"You will" replied Gangaram, " find me, where you met me last night."

Moorala, then, went back and communicated it to her mistress. Gangaram had not spoken anything explicitly, and, accordingly, Rama could not make anything out of the information, Moorala now brought her. She therefore grew restless. It resulted in Moorala again conducting Gangaram, towards the close of the night, into Rama's presence. The guard of the previous night's celebrity was on watch, and again the Mayor of Mahammadpur passed for Moorala's brother.

Ushered into the presence of Rama, Gangaram uttered a good deal of nonsense of which he himself could make neither head nor tail, far less Rama. The fact was, that he had lost his head—the floral arrow of that clever archer had carried it before itself. Gangaram had only left to himself his two eyes. And he now turned them into the best possible account to gaze upon the charms of Rama—with his ears, he drank in the sweet melody of her voice. Yet was he far from being gratified.

The only memory, which Gangaram possessed, was, that he did not disclose anything of Chandrachoorh's policies to Rama. Indeed, he came only to behold, and not to say his say. He therefore beheld, and, in rerurn, surrendered his own heart at the time of parting. Again, Moorala led him out of the house. When separating, Moorala asked :—" Do you wish to come again ?"

" Wherefore should I come again ?" was Gangaram's response.

Moorala :—A little bird whispers in my ears, that you will come again.

Gangaram stood on a slippery way, with his eyes shut. He remained silent.

In the meantime, Torab Khan sent one of his men to say in reply to Chandrachoorh's proposal, that in the event of the latter, agreeing to deliver up the kingdom for a low price, he would pay money ; but Sitaram must be made over.

Chandrachoorh's reply was :—"We will deliver Sitaram up to the Fauzdar, but a low price will not do."

Torab Khan asked :—"How much do you want ?"

Chandrachoorh set a high price and Torab Khan, a low one. Chandrachoorh, then, suffered himself to be a little beaten down, and Torab Khan hieghtened his offer. Thus was Chandrachoorh engaged in deluding the Mahamedan.

CHAPTER VII.

The brazen-faced Moorala proved a prophetess after all—again did Gangaram go into the presence of Rama. The reason was, that Gangaram could not help going. Rama would not invite him any more. She would simply send Moorala, at intervals, to know, if there was anything, worthy of being communicated to herself. Gangaram however, would take particular care not to divulge anything to Moorala. He would say :—"These are matters confidential and, as such, cannot be confided to people like you. I will call personally, one of these days, and speak to her." As a matter of course, Rama again sent for Gangaram. For how could she sustain her life, without knowing the precise date of the Mahamedans' advent ? Only think of their entering the town, quite unawares, one day at meal time at 12 o'clock ! Necessarily, Gangaram had to be conducted again. On this occasion, Gangaram did not inspire her with courage, but put her to a greater fear and rendered his own future ways, into the younger queen's presence, smooth. Gangaram possessed not the courage to speak out his mind to Rama. Artless Rama, too, could not comprehend the meaning of Gangaram's demeanour. So, these visits were not for the purposes of amorous *tete-a-tete*. Gangaram was fully aware, that that was out of the question. Only a few moments' conversation rendered him so very happy !

This was not love. For had it been love, Gangaram would never have caused Rama's anguish to be increased by frightening her. It was the vilest of all passions, ruining everybody, whose heart it got possession of.

Putting Rama to fear in this way, Gangaram separated from her. Rama wanted to go over to her father's house. But he negatived the

proposal with the assurance, that such a course was not at all needed, under the existing circumstances. As a matter of course, a couple of days later, Rama again sent for Gangaram. Gangaram called, and matters went on in this way.

Who ever has succeeded in getting into the lion's den and coming out unscathed? If these visits, between Rama and Gangaram, had taken place, times without number, in the presence of others, then there could have been nothing to supply food for the tongue of scandal. For Rama's soul was very pure—very innocent. But visits like these at the third part of the night—visits trembling for detection—such visits as these were highly improper. Even if they would lead to nothing else, they would, of a certainty, lead to a little tenderness, a little want of reserve in conversation, a little of carelessness in talks, and a little of the blending of hearts. And such, indeed, proved to be the case. Rama had not perceived it at first. But a single expression of Moorala's struck her, like a "truth angelic." Moorala had a talk with the sentinel one day on the subject. The up-country man said :—"Look here! how is it, that your brother comes on frequent visits inside?"

Moorala replied :—"What business have you to know it, hypocrite that you are? Don't you fear the broom?"

The guard said :—"To be sure, I do; but I tremble for my life as well."

Moorala observed :—"Have you, then, got more lives than one? Am I not your life?"

The man responded :—"Well, well, death will not result, in case you renounce me. But once life is out, every thing will be dark. I will no more leave the gate in favour of your brother."

Moorala said :—Be it as you say. But I'll leave you henceforward. What say you to that?

The guard, then, went on :—"Look here! that individual is not your brother, but must be a person of distinction. Well, then, what's his business here, I don't know, nor do I care to know. Who knows, but that he comes here to keep watch over the zenana? The only thing is, that since his visits are so very stealthy, should we not get something? You must have got some reward; give half of it to me, and I'll keep my own counsel."

Moorala returned :—"He has not given me anything yet. I will certainly go in shares with you, when I get something."

The man said :—"Let's take half and half."

Moorala took it to be a very rational suggestion. Things, like a piece of finery, or a piece of wrap, she had already got from the queen, but nothing, as yet, from Gangaram. She, therefore, called her faculties to her own aid and said to the worthy Pande :—"Very well, when he comes the next time, don't you pass him. No—not inspite of my advocacy. In that case, we will make him come down with the dust."

Therefore, when Gangaram sought admittance into the junior infanta's apartment, the next time the guard did not pass him. Moorala first reproved, then she besought and entreated ; but to no effect. Gangaram, then, held a consultation with Moorala. He thought of revealing himself, so that on being convinced of his identity, as the Lord Mayor of the Town, the guard might not object to pass him. But Moorala thought otherwise. She said :—"Yes, he will not object, but will talk to others. Should the fact of my brother's visits gets spread abroad, then the consequences thereof will be visited upon me alone."

Gangaram acknowledged the wisdom of the suggestion. He now thought of killing the man on the spot. But it would be worse still. Perhaps it would lead to the way of the visits being barred for ever. And he desisted from carrying out his intention. The watchman, too, persistently refused to pass him. As a matter of course, he was compelled to go back to his own quarters that night.

When Moorala made her appearance alone, the queen asked :—"Will he not come to-night ?"

Moorala :—He came, but the guard did not pass him.

The queen :—And why not ? He passed him on all previous occasions !

Moorala :—He seems to have become suspicious."

The queen :—Suspicious of what ?

Moorala :—What's the use of your knowing that ? We cannot bring ourselves to let you into things like that. I think we had better purchase his secrecy by giving him something.

Rama's frame was now covered with perspiration. Sweating—

trembling, she could not support herself on her legs. Then, she lay stretched on her back and, closing her eyes, became insensible. Such a thought had never occurred to her. With others, the case might have been different. But her mind was so highly swayed with fear, that she could not have bestowed the slightest reflection on the question. And now it struck her like a thunderbolt. She now saw, that she had, indeed, been guilty of the grossest impropriety. However numskulled she might be, she was a woman, particularly a Hindoo woman, to whom matters like these, when once they strike upon the senses, become very clear. She now recalled to mind every detail of the conversation that had taken place and saw the utter impropriety of the step. And she thought of swallowing poison, or of drawing a knife across her throat. After a good deal self-deliberation, she determined to slit her wind-pipe. For, in such a case, there would be an end of all evils, as also of the terror from the Mahamedans. But what was to be done with regard to the boy? And Rama's last resolution was, that she would draw a knife across her throat, after the return of the king, so that proper arrangements might be made for the nursing of the child, provided she could avoid the hands of the Mahamedans till then. Verily, such a chance was highly scarce. Still, however, she would not invite Gangaram, nor send anybody to him. So, Rama did not send anybody to Gangaram. Neither did she allow Moorala to call upon him.

When, therefore, Gangaram saw, that neither Rama invited him, nor Moorala visited him, he lost his patience. He, then, refrained from food and rest. Gangaram now set out on a search for Moorala. But Moorala was an abegail, belonging to a kingly establishment and, as such, was not wonted to be exposed to public gaze. Only at the order of the queen, she had strolled out in search of Gangaram. As a matter of course, Gangaram had no knowledge of her whereabouts. He, then, appointed a woman for his messenger and sent her to bring Moorala to himself. He dared not send her to Rama herself.

Moorala called and enquired :—"Wherefore am I wanted?"

Gangaram :—Why not enquire for further information?

Moorala :—But you do not deign to divulge anything, even when asked for. You put no faith in us!

Gangaram :—Well, well, I might have personally carried the information !

Moorala :—Towards that, eight of the fruit,* that is given in offerings.

Gangaram :—What do you mean ?

Moorala :—The younger queen has recovered,

Gangaram :—And, pray, what was she ailing of, that she has now recovered ?

Moorala :—Don't you know what was her malady ?

"No" said Gangaram.

Moorala :—Did you not mark, that 'twas something like insanity ?

Gangaram :—What mean you ?

Moorala :—Or else, are you the man to obtain access into the zenana ?

Gangaram :—Pray, why not ?

Moorala :—Are you fit for such a place ?

Gangaram :—What place, then, am I fit for ?

"For these rags of mine," was Moorala's reply. "If you want" she went on, "to conduct anybody to a paternal house, just conduct me. I am a *Kaibarta*† by caste. I have been wedded two times and a half, and if you have no objection to that, then, on my side, too, I have none, indeed, in being married three times and a half."

And delivering herself in this way, Moorala darted away, with a sweet smile, playing upon her lips. Gangaram saw, there was nothing to hope for in that quarter. But "nothing to hope for" was not the thing to console the mind with. Once a man's mind is given up to vices, he gets full of hope, so long as he is capable of them. "Well, I'll sell my soul to the Devil for Rama" said Gangaram unto himself. With this resolution, he appeared in all the innate terribleness of his nature and came back to his residence. That very night, after a vast deal of deliberation, he alighted upon something, to bring about the ruin of Sitaram and Rama.

* That is, plantain. The Bengalis regard plantain as a symbol of the subversion of all hope, so that its display, at the outset of an undertaking, is regarded as foreboding evil.—S. C. M.

† A caste, belonging to the lower order of the Hindu society, the water supplied by the members whereof is accepted by Brahmans.—S. C. M.

CHAPTER VIII

After the lapse of a pretty long time, did Sree and Yayanti present themselves at the vale of the mount Lalitgiri, on the banks of the Virupa water. The reader must recollect, that they were invited by the hermit. Hence the presence of the twins.

The hermit permitted only Yayanti to see himself, but not Sree. Yayanti entered the cave of Hastigumpha alone. In the meantime, Sree took to lounging about on the banks of the Virupa. Then, mounting the top of the mount and seating herself at the foot of one of the sandal trees, she feasted her eyes upon the grandeur of a cluster of palms on the river side. By this time, Yayanti came out of the cave.

Without even enquiring what the hermit had enjoined, Sree said :—"What sweet carolings of birds ! The ears have been quite filled with them !"

Yayanti asked :—"Are they as sweet as the voice of thy lord ?"

Sree's answer was :—"Like the rippling—murmuring sound of this streamlet."

Yayanti again questioned :—"But do they resemble the voice of thy husband ?"

Sree responded :—"'Tis a long time since I heard my husband's voice, and don't remember it well !"

Alas, for Sitaram !

The fact was known to Yayanti, and she mentioned it only to direct Sree's attention to it. She then said :—"Do you think 'twill sound so very sweet, if heard now-a-days ?

Sree remained silent. After a brief pause, she raised her countenance, and looking Yayanti fully in the face, she asked :—

"Why? Has the hermit commanded me to go upon a visit to my husband?"

Yayanti :—What art thou talking of *thy* going upon such a visit? He has even enjoined *me* to accompany thee.

"Wherefore?" was Sree's query.

Yayanti :—'Twill lead to good' says he.

Sree :—For me what good or evil—weal or woe can there be in that, dearest sister?

Yayanti :—Dost thou not comprehend it, Sree? Is so much explanation still needed for thee?

Sree :—No. I don't pretend comprehension of thy meaning.

Yayanti :—Had only thy own good or evil been aimed at, the venerable father would never have commanded thee thus. He never enjoins anybody to be on the look out for self-interest. There's nothing, savouring of good or evil, so far as thou, personally, art concerned.

Sree :—Yes, yes; now do I see it, indeed. Such a visit, at this time, is likely to bring about my husband's good.

Yayanti :—He is never explicit,—never condescends to so much explanation. Nor does he like to speak too much to us. But, then, I know, that this only can be the meaning, clothed in what he has said. And from what thou hast heard and learned from me, thou, too, I think, wilt be in a position to see it.

Sree :—But wherefore shouldst thou go?

Yayanti :—He has not explained the reason. It is because of his behest, that I will go. Wandering is my only occupation, and nothing else. Wherefore, then, should I *not* go? Now, then, art thou ready?

Sree :—That's what I am thinking of.

Yayanti :—And why thinking? Is it because of the remembrance of that matter of husband-slaughter?

Sree :—Far from it. It has ceased to generate the sentiments of fear in my mind.

Yayanti :—And wherefore it has ceased to do so? First give me the explanation, and then I will decide, if I should accompany thee.

Sree :—'Tis not for a mortal to slaughter a fellow-mortal, my

dearest sister! With One alone rests the power of dealing death, and He hath dealt death upon the one, who is to die. Everybody is subject to death. Whether through my agency, or through that of somebody else, is he sure to embrace death one day or the other. It is quite useless for me to say, that willingly I will never kill him. But, then, if it be ordained by the Lord of everything, that 'tis through me, that he is to be exempted from the vexations of this care-fraught world, then who can violate such a decree? Whether roaming in forests, or away from him by the width of an ocean, I can't rise superior to divine command. Cautiously, will I go on acting according to the doctrines of righteousness and piety. If, however, it leads to *his* danger, 'tis of no consequence to me.

Ho, ho, Sitaram! after whom art thou roving?

Yayanti was mightily pleased at heart. As a return, due to a preceptress by her pupil, did she take the utterances of Sree. But she had not done yet. She therefore asked :—"Why, then, art thou still undecided?"

Sree :—I am thinking, if he does not permit me to separate from him—

Yayanti :—And now that thou art no longer fearful of the consequence, fore-shadowed by thy horoscope, why shouldst thou, on thy own side, seek to part?

Sree :—Do I any longer deserve a seat on the left of a king?

Yayanti :—A thousand times. Thou must be highly ignorant of thy own charms, enhanced as they are many times more than when I met thee on banks of the Suvarnarekha, or of the Vaitarani.

Sree :—Oh, hush!

Yayanti :—Art thou equally unconscious of the increase in thy virtues? Which of the queens in this world is equal to thee in that respect?

Sree :—Is it thus, that thou dost comprehend my meaning? Where hast thou constructed a road, connecting my mind with thy own? Did I allude to that? I only meant, that the Sree, whom to call back he did so much, is no longer in existence. At thy hands she has ceased to be a denizen of this world, and the woman of that name, yet drawing breath, is thy pupil. Do you mean to say that the Maharajadhiraja Sitaram Roy will be happy in the company of

thy pupil, or thy pupil in the society of a Maharajadhiraja ? To be enthralled to the offices of a queen is not fit for thy pupil.

Yayanti :—Is my pupil, then, an object, to be affected by weal or woe ? Shame to such a pupil !

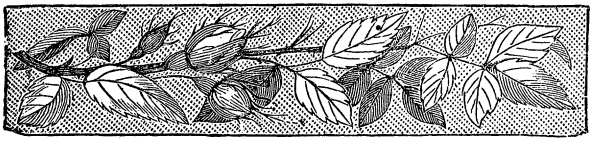
And a smile played upon Yayanti's lips.

Sree :—Well, I may not be quite such an object, but he is. Don't you think, he will be distressed at heart to find, that *his* Sree is no more in existence, and that in her material frame, the pupil of a Vaisnavi or a Bhairabi is palming off a supposititious Sree ?

Yayanti :—He may or he may not be. No use discussing matters like that. And since thou hast fixed thy mind upon the lotus feet of eternal charms, belonging to Krisna, see, that nothing else finds a place in thy heart, and everything will go on smoothly. Now, then, since we are to do good, whether to thy husband, or to anybody else, let us start this moment.

The two then descended from the top of the mountain, and, by the riparian road on the side of the Virupa, took the direction of the Ganges. They collected flowers from the forest, skirting the road, occupied in analyzing them each in its petals, stamens and powders, and went on their journey. None of the two mentioned Sitaram's name any more. Why did the Almighty vest these wretches, with beauty and youth, is known to Him alone, and to that jolt-headed Sitaram, who searched every nook and corner for Sree. The reader will perhaps class them both with the Dakinis,* which act will be quite consistent with the author's own opinion of them.

* Witches.



CHAPTER IX

Rama thus escaped the peril that overhang her, but 'twas widely different with Gangaram. He fell ill and took to his bed. Those of the public duties, that were entrusted to him, therefore came to a stand-still. Like Rama he decided upon poisoning himself, and like Rama, who did not execute her intention, did he also not carry out his resolution.

It came to the notice of the revered Chandrachoorh, that the duties of the defence of the town, in this critical moment, were utterly neglected—the Mayor did not attend to them. He was told, that the Mayor had fallen ill and was stretched upon the bed. He, therefore, called to enquire into the state of his health. Gangaram said :—"Grant me a few days' leave. My health fails me, and I am quite incapacitated."

Chandrachoorh replied :—"From what I see, there does not appear to be anything wrong with your health. Methinks you're suffering mentally. The symptoms indicate it."

Gangaram lay on his couch. It seemed to him as if liquid fire had been circulating in his veins. One devoid of occupation suffers the most from internal heat. Nothing can be a better remedy for the disease of the mind than occupation.

Stretched on his bed, Gangaram came to certain decisions. They were :—

"By fair means, or by foul, I must possess Rama, or must die."

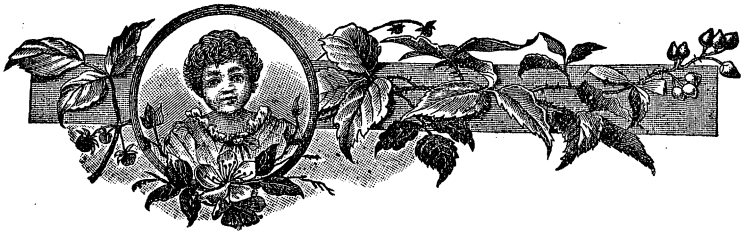
"Yes, there can be no harm in my dying. But to die, before possessing Rama, is terrible. As a matter of course, I must live to have her."

"There is no chance of my getting her by fair means, and therefore, foul ones must be had recourse to. Let'em betake themselves

to fair means, who can turn them to advantage. But how can he do so who cannot so use them ?"

The erroneous view, which Gangaram took of the matter, was general amongst all vicious people. They consider, that virtuous actions do not do for them, so they commit vicious ones. But that is not the right view. He, who endeavours to act righteously, finds it very easy to do so. Sinful people never make the attempt, and so they cannot.

Gangaram then went on deliberating with himself in the following way :—" To take to foul means is unavoidable. But how is that even practicable ? 'Tis by no means difficult to get possession of Rama. The moment I send the information, that the Mahamedans will invade the town to-morrow, she will come at once. Then she must yield with a good grace to whithersover I may lead her. But where am I to conduct her ? Not a day can be passed within Sitaram's jurisdiction. Even his return will not be awaited. Instantly will Chandrachoorh order me to be beheaded, and Mrinmaya will carry out the order. As a matter of course, I shall have to resort to such a place, beyond Sitaram's territory, where I shall likewise be beyond his reach. All such places are Mahamedan possessions. And of them, I am an escaped prisoner. Wherever I may go, they will cause me to be arrested, directly the information reaches them, and sentence me to be impaled. The only remedy is to wind myself round Torab Khan. With his favour, I shall have the grant of my life, as well as the possession of Rama's person. Yes, yes ; it can be managed.



CHAPTER X

Bande Ali, a man, belonging to the lower order of the Mahamedan community of Bhusana, had enticed away the wife of one of the higher order, and had taken her unto himself on terms of concubinage. The husband had endeavoured to recover his wife, forcibly carried off like Sita, while the *inamarato* had brought his lady-love over to Mahamadpur and had taken his abode there. To Gangaram he was already known. Through his favours, he was appointed a soldier in the army of Sitaram. Gangaram placed great confidence in him. This man, he now deputed to treat with Torab Khan. Through him, Gangaram said to the Fauzdar, that Chandrachoorh was a cheat. The latter's proposal, to make Mahamadpur over to the Fauzdar, was perfectly deluding. His aim was only to beguile time, so that Sitaram might return in the interval. The capital was not in Chandrachoorh's charge, and, as such, he had no power to dispose of it in the manner named, even if he had been resolved. No, not even Sitaram in person. But Gangaram himself was in a position to deliver the capital over to the Mahamedans. And the negociations he would himself make with the Fauzdar. But, in as much as he was an escaped offender, he dared not go before the Fauzdar, trembling for life. Should, however, the Fauzdar hold out to him the assurance of a free pardon, he could present himself.

Having imparted these instructions to Bande Ali, Gangaram asked him to fetch a "written reply."

Bande Ali said :—"Wherefore should the respected Fauzdar

rest so much confidence in me, as to be influenced to give a written answer ?"

Gangaram responded :—"I dare not address him a letter. You better carry this seal of mine. My seal in your possession, and the Fauzdar will believe you."

Bande Ali, then, made for Bhusana, with Gangaram's seal in his own possession. He had an acquaintance in the Fauzdar's establishment. Cherag Ali, the Bakshi* of the Karcoon's department of the Fauzdar's office, was his friend. And Bande Ali now asked the Bakshi to procure him an interview with the Fauzdar, as he had "something particular to speak to him." The Bakshi again applied to the Karkoon, and the latter, in his turn, recommended him to the Peshkar, who procured the interview.

Bande Ali faithfully fulfilled his mission and asked for a written answer. Torab Khan reflected for a while. He saw, that Gangaram had slipped out of his clutches, and no harm could possibly arise out of a free pardon being granted to him. He, then, finished the following billet with his own hand :—"Thou art pardoned. Thou shalt appear before me the next night."

Bande Ali now left Bhusana. Chand Shaha Faquir, who was introduced to the reader, in the temple of Luckshminarayanji, was a passenger in the boat, which conveyed Bande Ali to the opposite side. The mendicant now drew Bande Ali into a conversation. To his query,—"whither didst thou go ?" Bande Ali replied :—"To Bhusana." The Faquir, then, enquired into the state of affairs at Bhusana. Bande Ali had imbibed a little spirit of importance in consequence of having obtained an interview with the Fauzdar. And in speaking of the affairs at Bhusana, he exceeded the boundary and spoke of the Kotwal,† the Bakshi, the Moonshi,‡ the Karcoon, the Peshkar§ and even of the Fauzdar himself. The mendicant was amazed. He was devoted to Sitaram's good. He, therefore, resolved upon being "a little on the look out."

---

* An officer, next in rank to the Karcoon, the Surveyor.
† The Police officer.
‡ The Correspondence Clerk.
§ The Bench Clerk.

CHAPTER XI

Gangaram had a private interview with the Fauzdar. The Fauzdar did not terrify him in any way, and matters of importance were, therefore, all settled. Gangaram agreed to allow the Fauzdar to enter the fortress, on his marching up to its front. But the Fauzdar said :—"Well, thou sayst thou wilt admit us into the fort when we have fought our way up to its front. Now, Mrinmaya is the commander of a large army. Ten to one, he will oppose us on the way, especially at the time of our crossing the river. A battle always results either in a victory, or in a defeat. If we are victorious, in that case, we may possess the fortress, even without thy assistance. If, however, we lose the battle, thy help will not benefit us in the least degree. What hast thou thought of that ?"

Gangaram answered :—"There are two ways, connecting Bhusana to Mahammadpur,—the northern and the southern. The latter leads to a certain point, and if the river is crossed at this point, it will take you to some distance, whereas, the former will lead you to a spot, just opposite the fortress. In order to invade Mahammadpur, you lead your army by the southern way. Mrinmaya will believe it, because, it is a matter of difficulty to cross the stream just opposite the fort. In that case, he will be led to confront you in the southern passage, and you, in the meantime, cross the river opposite the fortress. At that time, there will be very little or no force in the fort, and thus you will be able to make your entry without difficulty, and unopposed."

The Fauzdar added :—"But should it reach the ears of Mrinmaya, while marching by the southern passage, that we are leading our force by the other, he might turn round !"

Gangaram returned :—"Let half of your force be sent by the southern and the other moiety, by the northern way, letting, of course, nobody get a scent of the march of your army by the northern passage. It were well, if the force were despatched at night, and concealed in a thicket at some distance. Then, when Mrinmaya, at the head of his army, has gone a certain way off, you may be quite secure. In such a case, Mrinmaya's force, being attacked from both sides, will be destroyed."

At this advice, the Fauzdar was pleased, and he agreed to the proposal. He said :—"Well and good. I see, thou hast our good at heart. Doubtless the expectation of certain reward has persuaded thee to adopt such a course. Tell me, then, what reward thou desirest ?"

Gangaram responded :—"Let Naldi Pergunnah be awarded to me."

The Fauzdar said :—"We are going no more to leave Mahammadpur in the hands of the Hindoos. But if thou wishest, I may appoint thee *Sipahasalar*,* grant thee a freehold of villages, and give thee money as reward into the bargain."

"That will be quite enough" was Gangaram's answer. "I have he added "another favour to ask for. Sitaram has two wives"—

The Fauzdar observed :—"They are for the Nawab's enjoyment, and thou canst not get them."

Gangaram said :—"Let the elder be sent over to Moorsidabad and the younger, given to this slave as his reward."

In a tone of railery, the Fauzdar, now observed :—"What shouldst thou do with Sitaram's spouse ? Take for granted, that Sitaram falls in the battle. Yet, however, amongst the Hindoos, there's no remarriage of widows. Hadst thou been a Mahamedan, thou mightest have taken her as thy *necka* wife."†

To Gangaram, this piece of advice seemed very rational. If he embraced the Mahamedan faith, got Rama converted into it with the help of the Fauzdar and then married her, in such a case, Sitaram could have no claim upon her, even if he did not die.

* The Commandant of an army.
† A wife taken not in proper weddock, but in a cystem of concubinage.

Without any sort of molestation, he might revel in the charms of Rama. He accordingly answered :—Of the truth of the Islamite faith, I am getting more and more convinced every day, and am resolved to embrace it, but not till I've got possession of Rama."

With a smile, playing upon his lips, the Fauzdar now asked :—Well, who is this Rama ? Is she Sitaram's younger bride ? Well, then, if thy salvation is not effected without her, I must see, that thou dost get her, and thou needst not be anxions for that. One word more. Is it a fact, that Sitaram has got a vast amount of treasure, secured under ground ?

Gangaram's response was :—" Such is the popular belief."

Torab Khan questioned :—" Then thou wilt be able to point it out ? "

Gangaram replied :—The exact spot is not known to me.

" Thou wilt " asked the Fauzdar " cause enquiry to be made ? "

Gangaram returned :—" Such an enquiry, at present, will entail loss of confidence upon me."

Torab Khan said nothing further.

With a light heart Gangaram now took his departure and came back to Mahammadpur directly.

Gangaram had not the least suspicion, that he was dogged by Chand Shaha Faquir. The next morning the mendicant had a private interview with Chandrachoorh Thacoor and said :—" Well I'm come to deliver a happy piece of intelligence—the Islamites shall be victorious."

Chandrachoorh knew it for certain, that Chand Shaha treated the Hindoos and the Mahamedans alike. He was not an advocate of partisanship, but always espoused the cause of justice, and was in Sitaram's favour. Without, therefore, being able to comprehend the Faquir's meaning, he asked :—" What's the matter ? "

Chand Shaha replied :—" Even the Hindoos do support the Mahamedans."

Chandrachoorh :—Certain Mahamedans, to be sure.

" Not excepting you yourselves " said Chand Shaha.

Chandrachoorh :—What mean you ?

The mendicant :—Take, for instance, Gangaram Dass, the Mayor.

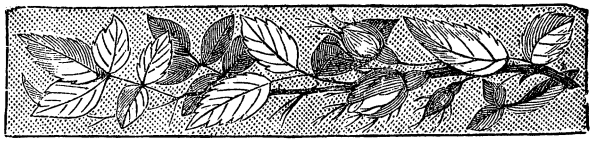
Chandrachoorh :—Gangaram is a true Hindoo, and enjoys the largest share of the king's confidence.

"So, he went to Bhusana last night and saw Torab Khan," retorted Chand Shaha.

Chandrachoorh :—What ! no, no, 'tis false.

Chand Shaha :—I dogged him to and from Bhusana.

Thus speaking, Chand Shaha darted away. Chandrachoorh was totally lost in amazement. His brilliant faculties seemed suddenly extinguished.



CHAPTER XII

Having regained his faculties in time, Chandrachoorh reflected to see what could be the remedy? He saw, there was no alternative left than the deposition and imprisonment of Gangaram. But how to effect them? If Gangaram set him at defiance? The Presidency force being under his command, Gangaram could rather throw *him* into the dungeon. Without, therefore, Mrinmaya's co-operation, it would not be practicable to incarcerate him. But since Gangaram had turned a traitor, how to put confidence in Mrinmaya? However, the wary never suffered. Better, then, to be circumspect. If danger befell nevertheless, Narayana would succour. But, first of all, 'twas necessary to ascertain Gangaram's motives. And musing in this way, Chandrachoorh held his counsel. After nightfall, his secret emissary came back with the information, that the Fauzdar's army was marching towards Mahammadpur by the southern passage.

Chandrachoorh now sent for Mrinmaya and Gangaram. On their making their appearence, a council of war was held. It was decided, that Mrinmaya should march that night by the southern route, with his troops, to prevent the Mahamedan force from crossing the stream.

Chandrachoorh said :—"I think, Gangaram, also, should march, as the second in command, in aid of Mrinmaya."

Gangaram remained speechless to see what could be Mrinmaya's own view.

Mrinmaya was piqued. "Am I not," thought he, "able to fight alone, that Gangaram should go with me?" And he said sharply :—"Oh, very well let him go!"

Gangaram now said :—" Should I go, who will protect the capital ? "

Chandrachoorh replied :—" Mrinmaya will leave somebody able enough for that."

Gangaram :—The responsibility of protecting the metropolis rests upon my shoulders. I will not leave the fortress.

" Very well," said Chandrachoorh, " I will protect the capital."

Gangaram :—I dare say you will ; but I must do the portion, entrusted to me.

Chandrachoorh grew very much suspicious and said :—" Well, then, do as you think proper."

And now commenced the preparations for the battle. Mrinmaya was ready harnessed with his troops. He, therefore, instantly marched towards the southern route, a handful of soldiers being left for the protection of the capital. And these troops were left in the command of Gangaram.

In the midst of these excitements, does the reader remember poor Rama ? The news of the advent of the invaders had reached her ears in the same way, that it had reached those of others. Moorala said :—Oh, my lady ! do be prepared to take thyself beneath thy paternal roof.

Rama replied :—" If I am to die, die I must here, rather than tread the paths of infamy. But you go to Gangaram once. If I'm to die, I must die on this spot ; but he is pledged to the safety of my child. Remind him of his pledge and let him come in time and protect the infant. Tell aim also, that I will not meet him any more—no, on no consideration whatever."

Then, with a view to tranquilize her agitated feelings, Rama went into Nanda's quarters. None of the inmates of the castle went to bed that night.

Moorala now sallied forth in search of Gangaram. Gangaram was alone in his chamber in the solitude of a profound reflection. He was going to plunge headlong into the sea, in expectation of gems. Would he able to swim to the coast again ? With all the firmness of his mind, Gangaram succeeded not in finding out a satisfactory solution for the problem. A man, in a similar situation, at last centres all hope in Heaven and exclaims :—" Resign everything

to the will of Him." But Gangaram dared not do that even. He knew, Heaven never helped anybody, in the achievement of things highly pernicious—he knew, that the Father of the universe proved inimical to such an individual. Gangaram was, therefore, sadly wrapped up in his own thoughts.

It was at this moment, that Moorala entered the apartment and communicated the information, sent by Rama. Gangaram said :—"If she so desires, I may go this moment and fetch the infant."

Moorala returned :—"No such thing. What she means is, that when the Mahamedan force invade the fortress, you'll go and protect the bantling."

Gangaram :—Well, who can predict what may occur then ? If she really wants to have the child protected, let her deliver it to me this instant.

Moorala :—Shall I then fetch the child ?

Gangaram :—No, I have many things to speak to her.

Moorala :—Very well ; leave them for the month of *Pous*.*

Thus speaking, Moorala flitted away, with a smile of mockery playing upon her lips. But no sooner had she fairly quitted Gangaram's dwelling and gained the public street, than her smile was suddenly stopped, and a dark cloud of consternation lowered over her countenance. She saw before her two Bhairabis, with tridents in their hands, and their form, surrounded with a lustre, as bright as that of the lucifer. And taking them to be the companions of Sankari,† Moorala made her obeisance to them, rolling in dust and, with joined hands, stood speechless before them.

One of the Bhairabis asked :—"Who art thou ?"

Moorala reverentially replied :—"I am Moorala."

The Bhairabi asked :—"Who is Moorala."

Moorala's answer was :—"The maid of the younger queen."

The Bhairabi again questioned :—"What have you been doing in the house of the Lord Mayor, at this hour of the night"

Moorala responded :—"I was sent by the Maharani."

---

* It is a native way of hinting on matters, impossible of accomplishment, to say, that it would be done in the month of *Pous* (the last half of December and the first half of January).—S. C. M.

† Consort of Siva.

The Bhairabi said :—" Do you see the temple yonder ?"

Moorala answered :—" Yes, I do."

The Bhairabi said :—" Follow us thither."

Moorala responded :—" As you will it."

Then, the two Bhairabis conducted Moorala to the temple, between the points of their tridents.

CHPATER XIII

Chandrachoorh Tarkalankara could not sleep that night. He had patrolled the town and found it was quite unprotected. On his intimating the fact to Gangaram, the latter had met him with an overbearing insolence Thereupon, with a heart, full of repentance for having neglected to imprison Gangaram, and thereby brought about the disaster, he sat on his *kooshashan** and fell to the contemptation of the Preserver of all, the Remover of all disasters and the Extirpator of the terrible demon, Madhu. At one moment, he thought of collecting a number of soldiers, making Gangaram a captive, and of appointing another to the defence of the capital. Then he thought, that the army was not under his own command, but that of Gangaram, and any endeavour in that direction would not succeed. Had Mrinmaya been present, the evil might have been averted, in as much as the soldiers were obedient to him. He, therefore, repented, because he had sent out Mrinmaya and thereby, to a certain extent, had himself been the cause of the disaster. Consequently, he was now very much distressed at heart, and, like one inert, he devoted himself to the meditation of Hari, the Destroyer of the *Asuras*. All unawares, he was now confronted by a Bhairabi of fully developed charms, carrying a trident.

Surprized he asked :—"Who art thou, Motherly Being?"

The Bhairabi replied :—"The enemies are the gate, my child! How is it, that there's no preparation for the defence of the fortress? I have come to know it."

Sree had spoken to Moorala; but to Chandrachoorh had come

* A mat, about one cubit square made of the grass named *Kusha*.

Yayanti. The question simply enhanced Chandrachoorh's surprise. He enquired :—"Art thou, then, Mother! the Protecting Angel of this dominion?

Yayanti answered :—"Never mind me, only respond to my query. Else, nothing can ensure your welfare."

Chandrachoorh observed :—"Mother! I'm quite crippled. The King entrusted the defence of the capital to the Mayor. That officer does not mind his duties. The soldiers do not obey me. Command me what I'm to do."

Yayanti continued :—"Know you naught of the movements of the Mayor? Haven't you heard anything of his treachery?"

Chandrachoorh :—I've heard, that he went to Torab Khan, and may perhaps make over the capital to him. And, fool that I was, I did not adopt the necessary precaution. Methinks, Motherly Lady! thou art the Tutelary Goddess of this kingdom, and out of mercy alone hast made thy appearance before this slave of thine. Therefore, Mother! without in any way, having the lustre of thy frame ecclipsed, thou do defend thy own territory.

And with a heart, highly swayed by the feeling of reverence, Chandrachoorh united the palms of his hands and bowed before Yayanti.

"Then will I myself defend this territory," said Yayanti, and then she sped away. Chandrachoorh was reassured.

On her side, Yayanti got more than she had expected. Sree was waiting outside, and getting together, they now made for the abode of Gangaram.

CHAPTER XIV

After Moorala had departed, to Gangaram, the prospect seemed to be gloomier still. He now saw, that the lady, for whom he was plunging into the ocean of danger, had got no love for him. With his eyes closed was he diving into the ocean. Would he find out gems? Or, he was merely doomed to be drowned? Oh! gloomy—everything appeared gloomy! Who now would deliver him?

Suddenly Gangaram's flesh crept. He saw at his doors, a Bhairabi, whose frame gave out a halo, bright like that of the lucifer, and who carried a trident in her hand. The brightness of her body tended to ecclipse the light of the lamp, that burnt in the chamber. Imagining her to be the goddess Bhanani,* dropped down upon the earth, Gangaram took a leaf out of Moorala's book and made his obeisance to her. Then, with united palms of his hands, he stood before her and said:—"What is thy behest, Motherly Lady! upon this slave of thine?

Yayanti replied:—I'm come to ask for a boon, my child!

To Moorala, Sree had spoken. But Yayanti now came to Gangaram. Lest Gangaram should have recognized Sree, she had not entered the house.

Gangaram said to the Bhairabi:—"Thy wants, Motherly Being! shall be promptly supplied. Thou hast only to issue thy command."

Yayanti rejoined:—'Well, then, give me a cart-load of balls and powder, together with a gunner."

Gangaram could not soon make up his mind and thought:—

"Who is she ?" He now asked :—"Mother ! what art thou to do with balls and powder ?"

"The gods require them," replied Yayanti.

Gangaram grew highly suspicious. If she was a divinity indeed, wherefore would she require balls and powder ? If, on the other hand, she was a woman, whorefore should he supply her with ammunition ? Who knew, but that the woman was the spy of somebody ! Having reasoned with himself in this way, Gangaram enquired :—"Who art thou, Divine Lady"

Yayanti :—Never mind who am I. Only know, that everything, in connection with Rama, has come to my knowledge. I have equally been apprized of the fact of your visit to Bhusana. Therefore give me what I want, or I will kill you with this trident of mine."

And that spirited Bhairabi flourished her glittering trident and brandished it at Gangaram.

Gangaram was at once cowed down. With the expression "follow me and thy want shall be supplied," he conducted the Bhairabi into the arsenal. There he gave whatever Yayanti wanted and a gunner, named Peari Lal, into the bargain. Having, then, dismissed Yayanti, Gangaram ordered the gate of the stronghold to be closed, so that nobody could obtain access without his permission.

Thus provided with ammunition and a gunner, the two Bhairabis cleared the boundary of the fort and reached the bathing staircase in the river in front of the palace. There they met a tall, handsome youth.

Of the two Bhairabis, one slank at a little distance with the ammunition, followed by the gunner, while her companion approached the youth and, accosting him, she asked :—"Who art thou ?"

The youth answered :—"Whoever I may be, but who art *thou* ?"

Yayanti rejoined :—"If thou art a hero, here do I provide you with balls and powder ; just defend the capital."

The youngman was taken very much aback, and taking Yayanti for a divinity, he bowed to her. He, then, shut himself up into a reflection and a sigh escaped him. He then replied :—"What's the utility ?"

Yayanti questioned :—"What dost thou want ?"

The man questioned :—"May I get the object of my heart's desire on defending the capital ?

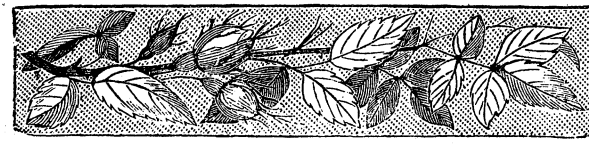
Yayanti :—Yes, thou mayst.

The youth :—Where is it to be found ? Thou dost appear to be some of the goddesses. That why I ask,—Where is the object to be met with ? Is it in this capital ?

Yayanti :—Yes, thou wilt meet with it in this capital.

The youngman :—When am I to get it ?

"Ah ! that's a matter of little time" replied Yayanti, and she vanished from his view at once.



CHAPTER XV

It has already been said, that Chandrachoorh could not sleep a wink that night. Leaving his bed very early in the morning, he ascended to the top of the palace and observed what was going on around. He saw, that on the other side of the river—just opposite the point, where he was stationed—a number of boats had collected. Besides, a large concourse of people was visible on the bank. It was not, however, clear day-light yet, and Chandrachoorh could not make out what sort of people the gathering was composed of. He now sent for Gangaram.

Gangaram met him on the top of the building. Chandrachoorh questioned :—"Why such a large number of boats on the other side ?"

Gangaram observed them well and said :—" I know not."

Chandrachoorh added :—"See, there's a large concourse of people also, on the bank. Wherefore so many people and why so many crafts ?"

Gangaram replied :—"I can't say."

While this discourse was taking place, the darkness was dispersed and the congregation was found to be composed of troops. Chandrachoorh now said :—"Perdition ! our spy has deceived us, Gangaram ! or he must have been duped himself. We have despatched our force by the southern passage, but the Fauzdari army has marched by this route. Ruin—nothing save ruin—now stares us in the face. Who is to defend the capital in the crisis ?"

Gangaram :—Why ? wherefore am I left here ?

Chandrachoorh :—But what can you do with a handful of sentinels ? the odds are against us. Moreover, you seem to be quite unmindful in the matter of the defence. On my intimating it to

you yesterday, you met me with an affront. But who is to answer for this disaster now ?"

Gangaram :—Don't be so much alarmed. The troops over there are not countless. How many soldiers can be conveyed in the few boats yonder ? I'll go this moment and, taking my station on the bank with my force, I will crush them the instant they are brought over.

Gangaram had made up his mind to issue from the fortress with his sepoys, but not till the Fauzdari army was conveyed across without opposition, so that, on his egress from the fort, the Mahamedans might effect their entry easily by the opened gate. He was resolved not to offer the least resistance. Had it been a phantom, that had appeared the previous day ? Why, since then it had not made its appearence any more !

Chandrachoorh saw it all ; but he refrained from making any overt display of his knowledge. He said :—"Haste you, then. Behold ! the boats are leaving their moorings with their military passengers."

Gangaram now hurried down from the terrace. With a heart, very much swayed by fear, Chandrachoorh, then, perceived, that about 50 boats, with an aggregate of five or six hundred sepoys, were rowing in a line. Impatiently, he went on watching when Gangaram would issue with his troops. The sepoys were dressing, turning, wheeling, lining, but not coming out. And he thought within himself :—"Alas ! a miserable wretch that I am, why did I rest any confidence in Gangaram ? Wherefore did I not turn the Faquir's warning to the best possible account ? Ruin—ruin is inevitable ! Where's that lustrous Angel ? Hath she, too, made a dupe of me ?" Chandrachoorh was about to descend from the top of the palace, with a view to look for Gangaram, when the report of a cannon smote his ears. It did not appear, that the report emanated from the Mahamedan crafts—it did not even seem that they were provided with cannons. Chandrachoorh called the best of his visual power to his own aid, yet he could not find smoke in any of the boats of the invaders. Surprized, he found, that simultaneously with the report of the cannon, one of the boats of the enemies sank into the river. The sepoys, who were the passengers in the drowned boat, were attempting to avail themselves of some of the other boats.

"Does the cannon then belong to us?" said Chandrachoorh and he strained his eyes to realize the true state of affairs. He saw, that not a single sepoy had yet emerged from the fort. Not a soul was visible near the cannon, placed on the ramperts. Who, then, had fired the canon?

And with a view to observe which direction the smoke emanated from, Chandrachoorh cast his eyes around and marked, that from the bathing staircase in the river in front of the palace, did the sable fumes in curling spires arise and were borne along on the wings of the wind.

Chandrachoorh, now, remembered, that there was a cannon, placed at the head of the Palace Stairs. With a view to prevent an enemy from anchoring his barge, Sitaram had placed a cannon there, and, ten to one, somebody was using it. But who was he? Not one of Gangaram's troops was out. The very gate of the fortalice was closed as yet. Mrinmaya's troops had, by that time, achieved a great distance; and it was highly impossible, that Mrinmaya should have left anybody to take charge of the cannon. It was equally impossible, that some layman should have fired the cannon. How was such a man to be endowed with such an unerring aim? It was, therefore, a trained gunner, who was using the cannon. Then who was he? In this way was Chandrachoorh reasoning wtth himself, when again the report of the cannon came booming, rolling, vibrating through the air. Again was the volume of fume borne along in the atmosphere above the surface of the stream, and again was a boat, belonging to the invaders drowned with its passengers.

"Bravo! Bravo!!" exclaimed Chandrachoorh and he clapped his hands in an exuberance of glee. "Surely, it is that Superhuman Lady—perhaps Goddess Kalika has dropped down upon the earth out of mercy. Success to Lakshminarayanji! Success to Kali! Success to the Angel, protective of the dominion." With a heart, fluttering with fear, Chandrachoorh, then, marked, that the troops, who were in the foremost of the boats and within whose gunshots the bank had come, now began to take aim and fire their guns. The smoke covered the sun itself—the sounds were too smart for the ears. And Chandrachoorh thought:—"Should our defender be a divinity, of what avail is this shower of bullets? Should,

however, he be a mortal, then it is all up with us. Who can make head against this shower of iron ?

In the midst of this reflection, the cannon boomed again. Again the atmosphere reverberated, and the curling fumes increased the volume of the smoke, and again was another Mahamedan boat drowned with sepoys.

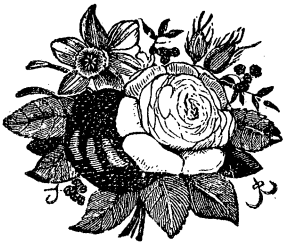
Then there ensued a great battle between that single cannon on one side, and on the other, hundreds and hundreds of Mahamedan troops. The sounds were quite intolerable to the organs of hearing. Successively did the cannon boom deep, smart and awe-inspiring, like thunder, hurled by the hands of Indra.* The whole surface of the stream became enveloped in smoke, so that, even from the great altitude of the palace terrace, Chandrachoorh could descry naught but a vast sheet of smoke, detached here and there by high waves. However, from those smart sounds, resembling the peal of thunder, he saw, that the Guardian Angel of the Hindoo religion was yet alive. Chandrachoorh, therefore, eagerly cast his eyes to find out a gap in that vast ocean of smoke to see what could be the result of this amazing engagement.

Gradually the reports of the cannon subsided : a low breath of the wind dispersed the smoke, and the scene of the battle broke clearly upon Chandrachoorh's view. He now saw, that the wrecked and drowned boats were being carried away before the tide, quite topsy-turvy. With the bodies of the dead and the living soldiers, the surface of the river wore the post-cyclonic appearance of a park, strewn as it would be with flowers and foliage, torn by the force of the storm. The weapons of the one, the regimentals of the other, the turban of the third and the body of the fourth, were carried adrift. Somebody was swimming for life, while the gavial was devouring another. The few boats, that were not drowned, were taken advantage of in conveying the remaining troops to the other side, and the boatmen were rowing them away for their lives, as it were. Like the troops of the *Asuras*, before the thunder, were the Mahamedans defeated by a single cannon, and they took to their heels.

* The King of the empyrean region.

Thereupon, with an upturned countenance and with a voice, nearly choked for tears, Chandrachoorh said, with united palms of his hands :—"O God ! O Hari ! the Suppressor of the *Daityas* and the Supporter of devotees ! success be unto thee ! This day thou hast manifested a mercy almost unheard of. To-day thou hast fought in person, or the Protecting Angel of this dominion. Or else, Sitaram, the slave of thy slave, has arrived. No mortal can fight such a battle, except that man of extreme devotion unto thee."

Chandrachoorh, then, descended from the top of the palatial architecture.



CHAPTER XVI

At the reports of the guns and the cannons, Gangaram wondered what could be the meaning? Who fought? Was it that Dakini? Could she be a divinity indeed? And Gangaram sent one of his Corporals to see what the matter really was. The Corporal, then, emerged from the fort. That was the first time, the portals of the fort were opened that day.

The Jamadar came back and said :—"Please, my lord, the Mahamedans fight."

Gangaram was displeased and said :—"Yes, I know it ; but with whom do the Mahamedans fight?"

The Jamadar :—With none.

Gangaram smiled and said :—" Is it ever possible, fool that thou art? Whom does the cannon belong to?

The Jamadar :—I haven't marked any cannon.

This irritated Gangaram very much, and he said :—"Dost thou not hear the reports of the cannon."

The Jamadar :—Yes, I do.

Gangaram :—Then who is the individual, firing the cannon?

The Jamadar :—I havn't seen that?

Gangaram :—Pray, where didst thou leave thy eyes?

The Jamadar :—I had them on my person.

Gangaram :—Why, then, hast thou not marked the cannon?

The Jamadar :—The cannon, I have seen, to be sure—the one placed at the head of the Palace Stairs.

Gangaram :—Ah ! is it so? Who has been using it?

The Jamadar :—The boughs of the tree.

Gangaram :—Why, thy faculties must have been unhinged, fellow ! Do boughs of a tree ever fire a cannon?

The Jamadar :—I have not observed any body else there, except a number of boughs, lowered down and concealing the cannon.

Gangaram :—Surely enough, somebody must have lowered the branches and from the security of the barrier, thus afforded, must have been firing the cannon. Verily and truly, the man is a wise one. The sepoys could not see him, but he could aim them from behind the boughs. Wherefore hast thou not looked behind the branches to see who was concealed there ?

The Jamadar : —That would have been a great risk.

Gangaram :—Wherefore ?

The Jamadar :—Like showers of rain, were bullets flying on all sides.

Gangaram : Why then, hast thou joined the army, white-livered that thou art ?

And Gangaram ordered one of his men to divest the Jamadar of his regimentals. Seeing that a battle was inevitable, Mrinmaya had appointed a number of chosen Hindoosthanis to the defence of the fortress. Gangaram now summoned four of them and said :— "Go you to where the cannon is placed at the head of the Palace Stairs and bring the individual whom you may find firing the cannon."

When the four soldiers reached the vicinity of the cannon, the battle came to an end, and the surviving Mahamedans were being rowed back. Peering behind the screen, afforded by the branches mentioned above, they found a man lying dead near the cannon, while another living one sat with the wick in his hand. The latter was a stalwart man, his winding-sheet was worn short, and a piece of cloth, winding round his face, was tied above his head. His entire form was begrimed with soot and gun-power. The four sepoys came up to, and caught hold of, him. They then asked :—"Well, who art thou ?"

The man replied :—"Why my fellows ?"

"Wherefore hast thou been firing the canon from thy place here ?"

"What harm has been done, my good men ? Have you sided with the Mahamedans ?"

"Well, had the Mahamedans come, we would have driven them away. Why hast thou molested them ? Now then, move on ; thou must be taken into the presence of our lord."

"Well, whom am I to go before ?"

"The Kotwal Saheb's order is, that thou must be taken into his presence."

"Very well, I'll go. Let only the Mahamedans be driven back. So long as a solitary soul is visible on the other side, I'll not budge an inch from this place, no—not even if your Kotwal came in person, not to speak of your own selves. In the meantime, just go and see if you can recognize the man lying dead over there."

The sepoys marked the corpse and exclaimed :—"Yes, yes ; we do indeed recognize him ! He is our gunner, Peari Laul. Where did he come here from ?"

"Then you carry him inside the fortress and I follow."

The sepoys now said to each other, "This individual speaks well. We were ordered to conduct the man, whom we wereto meet near the cannon. This dead body is found near the cannon and we must have it carried."

But a dead body, Hindu sepoys would never touch. They then sent one of themselves to fetch a Dome * the remaining three awaiting his return.

On the other hand, the soot-and-powder-begrimed youth saw, that one by one all the Mehamedans were taken to the bank opposite. He then accosted the sepoys and said :—"Now, come my good people, let me go and pay my respects to your worthy Kotwal."

Thereupon, the sepoys caught hold of him and led him on.

They led him on to where, surrounded by all the armed sentries of the fortress, the panic-stricken citizens stood like a train of ants.

Suddenly, there arose a cry of exultation, with which the whole atmosphere resounded. Thousands and thousands of voices shouted out in one breath :—

"Victory to Maharaja."

"Victory to Maharajadhiraja"

"Victory to Sri Sitaram Ray Rajadhiraja."

"Victory to Lackshminarayanji."

---

* One of the lowest caste of the Hindoo Society, the members whereof do not scruple to dispose of dead bodies, no matter to which caste the man, when living, belonged.

Chandrachoorh came hastily and folded the youth, all covered with soot though he was, in his arms, while the latter took the dust of his feet.

Chandrachoorh said :—"The fight itself convinced me of the fact of your arrival in the town. None else amongst the races of mortals is endowed with such an unerring aim but yourself. Now, however, before undertaking anything else, pass an order for Gangaram to be secured.

Sitaram then passed the necessary order; Gangaram was sneaking out at the sight of Sitaram, but secured, he became an inmate of the prison, at the latter's order.

CHAPTER XVII

Having then posted the sepoys near the cannons, placed on the ramparts of the fortress, as also in other suitable points, and having despatched a man to ascertain the movements of Mrinmaya, Sitaram separated and went to perform his ablution and incantations. Afterwards, he was closetted together with Chandrachoorh in a colloquy. Chandrachoorh said :—" O Maharaja ! we have not been able to know the precise hour of thy arrival. Why hast thou come back alone ? Where is thy retinue ? No mishap befell you in the way ? "

Sita :—Having parted company with my suite in the way, I proceeded ahead. In order to ascertain the condition of the capital during my absence, I entered it during the still hours of the night, in disguise. I saw it was absolutely unprotected. I have since ascertained the reason. Then, on seeking to effect an entry into the fort, I saw, that the gate was closed. Without, therefore entering it, I approached the river side, as it was drawing towards the dawn, and saw, that the Mahamedan force was crossing the river in boats. Those, that were charged with defence of the fortalice, were quite inactive. I have therefore done what lay in my power.

Chandra :—Whatever you have done is possible with you alone, and none else. But whence did you procure sach a quantity of ammunition ?

Sita :—A goddess looked mercifully upon me and supplied me with balls, powder and a gunner.

Chandra :—A goddess—do you say ? She appeared beforeme also. She is the Guardian Angel of this dominion. Where did she go ?

Sita :—After getting me the ammunition she vanished. Now, pray, tell me what has happened during these few months.

Chandrachoorh now detailed all the particulars, as he himself knew them. He at length said :—Now tell me, how far you've met with success in the matter, that had necessitated your presence in Delhi ?"

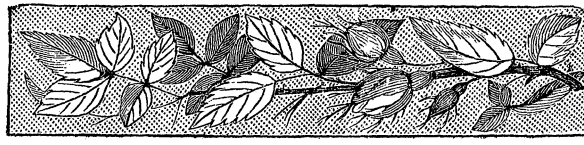
Sita :—My mission has proved successful. I was in a position to render the Emperor a little service. So, pleased with me, he has granted to me an ascendancy over 12 territorial lords, as also a *Sanad*, confering upon me the title of Maharajadhiraja. Now, this hostility with the Fauzdar I regard as a calamity. Because the Fauzdar is the subaltern of the Subadar, and the latter, of the Emperor. So, an enmity with the Fauzdar is virtually a hostility with the Emperor. To take arms against him, who has befriended me so much, would be a deed of the blackest ingratitude. Of course everybody is entitled to self-defence ; but a battle with the Fauzdar with any ulterior object will be unjust on my part. This hostility, therefore, is a matter of misfortune to me.

Chandra :—It's a matter of our good luck—of everybody's good luck. For, should you prove friendly to the Mahamedans, who would protect the Hindoos from them ? Where, in such a case, would Hindooism find a resting place ? It is equally fortunate for you. Because, of all men, the one, by whom the regeneration of Hindooism is to be effected, shall be regarded as the luckiest.

Sita :—Nothing can be decided so long as Mrinmaya's movements are not known.

News came from Mrinmaya after nightfall. One of the General Officers of the Fauzdar, named, Pir Bux, was marching with half of the army. He was met by Mrinmaya half way, and a battle ensued. Unable to cope with Mrinmaya's unrivalled courage and adroitness, he was defeated and slain. Victorious Mrinmaya was returning with his troops.

Chandrachoorh now addressed Sitaram and said :—"No use losing time, Great King ! Follow up your victory by taking possession of Bhusana on the other side of the stream."



CHPATER XVIII

Yayanti said :—"Sree ! what dost thou deliberate ? Just go and pay a visit to thy husband."

Sree :—Have I come with such an object in view ?

Yayanti :—Nothing can render him so much happy, as thy company. Wherefore, then, shouldst thou not make him happy ?

Sree :—But it is you, who have taught me, that the restraint of thoughts is *yog* !

Yayanti :—Conquest of appetites is *yog*. Hast thou not succeeded in conquering them ?

Sree :—I do not speak of my own self.

Yayanti :—The individual, of whom 'tis spoken, thou wilt succeed in leading on to this way. That's why a visit is highly essential. Of all sorts of men, a Royal Hermit is the best. Wherefore not transform a King into a Royal Hermit ?

Sree :—Where's my ability ?

Yayanti :—I know 'tis by thee, that such a grand thing is to be achieved. Go thou this moment and make thy obeisance to King Sitaram.

Sree :—Yayanti ! the tinder-wood floats in the water. But attached to a piece of stone with a short chord, even the tinder-wood goes down. Am I to be drowned again ?

Yayanti :—A little amount of dexerity and the risk of being drowned may be avoided. The divers dive into the sea, but are never drowned. On the contrary, they bring gems with them.

Sree :—But I'm not confident of possessing similar powers. So, I'm not going to appear before the King yet awhile. Let me first test my mind. Should I find, that 'tis yet independent of me,

then, I'll forsake this part of the country, without paying the visit.

Yayanti :—But what of the promise, I have held out to the King, that I'll procure him your presence ?

" Let's deliberate for a few days if both the ends can be gained."

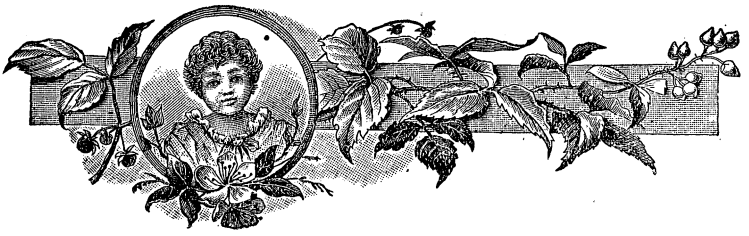
So Sree did not pay the King a visit at once.

END OF THE SECOND PART

SITARAM

PART III.

THE NIGHT—THE WITCH



SITARAM

PART III.

THE NIGHT : THE WITCH

CHAPTER I

Bhusana was conquered ; Sitaram won the battle ; Torab Khan was slain by Mrinmaya. These are all facts historical, and, as such, are of little moment to us. We cannot lose time in a detailed description of them. A romancist should be careful to record internal affairs. 'Tis useless for him to do anything with matters, falling within the range of history.

Bhusana was possessed. By the authority of the Imperial *Sanad*, and in consequence of his own prowess, Sitaram now established his ascendancy over twelve land-lords and, assuming the title of Maharaja, commenced his sway, with an undisputed authority.

Of the questions, connected with the administration, that of Gangaram's chastisement came into consideration first. There was no lack of evidence against him. Rama, though guilty of indiscretion, was devoted, heart and soul, to her husband, and she gave a sincere description of everything to Sitaram. The missing link in the chain of evidence was supplied by Moorala and Chand Shaha Faquir. It only remained to call upon Gangaram for an explanation, when a tremendous agitation was set on foot in connection with the event.

The facts did Rama relate to Sitaram in her own apartment, amidst a flood of tears. Sitaram could not disbelieve a syllable of what she said. He saw, guileless Rama was innocence itself. Her love as a parent only, led her into indiscretion in the present instance. But the inmates of the palace in general put a different construction upon the version. "Wherefore has Gangaram been thrown into the dungeon?" This question gave rise to a tremendous agitation. What owing to the stupidity of Moorala and what to the flippant garrulity of the warder Pande, people were led to associate Rama's name with it. Some said, Gangaram sought to sell the dominion to the Moguls. Other stated, that he was detected in the younger Queen's apartments, while a third group broached, that both the facts were true, but there was something else, and that was, that the younger Queen was leagued with Gangaram in the projected sale of the kingdom. Matters, such as these, may not reach the ears of the King, but they seldom fail to attact the notice of the Queens. Into the inner apartment, reports like these penetrate in highly overstrained forms. Both the Queens came to know it. Rama took to her bed, inundated the pillow with her tears, and at length resolved upon self-extirpation, by means either of drowning or of strangulation. Nanda, however, acted wisely.

Nanda traced Rama to where, burying her countenance in the pillow, she was shedding bitter and scalding tears and deciding to the best of her ability, which was the easier—death by drowning or by strangulation? And she said to her :—"I see the scandal has reached thy ears, too!"

Rama nodded an assent, as if saying :—"Yes, it has," and the tears gushed more profusely from her eyes.

Nanda wiped away the rheum from her eyes, and, in tender accents, said :—"Not all the weepings in the world will remove the shame, my beloved sister! Insead, therefore, of shedding these unavailing tears, let us do all we can to completely efface the odium. Rise, therefore; and in as calm and collected a manner, as thou canst command, tell me all the particulars. Do not—Oh! do not take me for a co-wife at this moment. Shame and disgrace may or may not overwhelm thee, but the head of the King, held so erect till lately, has been greatly lowered. He is thy lord, as well as mine.

Think not, therefore, that 'tis a matter, involving greater amount of disgrace to thee than to myself. Moreover, the King entrusted the charge of the inner apartment to me. What answer should I give, if the matter reached his ears ?"

Rama replied :—"Every particular of what happened, I have already told him. He has put faith in me, and has forgiven me into the bargain. Believe me, I'm in no way guilty !"

Nanda :—Spare thy remark. That thou art not guilty is a fact, so far patent, that it were not worth the trouble, thou wouldst take to convince me of it. However, thou mayst or mayst not tell me all the particulars of what happened—

Rama :—Wherefore should I not tell you ? I can declare the facts before anybody.

With these words, Rama checked the tears, that started in her eyes and, raising herself in her bed, she made a sincere statement of the facts before her co-wife. Nanda placed full confidence in her. She said :—"Hadst thou, dearest sister ! made me thy confidante in the slightest degree, then, thinkest thou, it could have come to this ? Let us however, pass it in silence. Reproach for what cannot be recalled is quite unavailing at this moment. On the other hand, we must have to do and dare everything that can restore us to reputation and to honour."

Rama :—And unless you do that, then rest assured, sister ! I'll do away with myself, either by plunging into the water, or else, by putting a rope round my neck. I am certainly a King's consort. Breathes there a solitary daughter of misery, who longs to live, having got such an infamy to tarnish the mirror of her reputation ?

Nanda :—Thou needst not lay violent hands on thyself, dearest sister ! But canst thou take a somewhat bold step ? For, in that case, methinks, people may cease to doubt thy purity.

Rama :—There's naught, that I would not do or dare for this. Speak, then, what you would have me to do ?

Nanda :—Everybody, to whom thou wilt give as sincere a description as thou hast given to me, will be led to believe thee—I think it will not be unsafe to surmise as much. If all the inhabitants of this town got a description of these facts from thy own lips, in that case, the scandal might well be averted.

Rama :—But how can *that* be practicable ?

Nanda:—I will ask the King to call a *darbar*. By a proclamation he will assemble all the subjects in it. There—in the presence of Gangaram—in the presence, alike, of the congregated body of towns-people—shalt thou make the statements. We are the sharers of a monarch's couch; we never do so much as bask in the glare of the sun. Wilt thou succeed in making a clean breast of everything, before all the citizens ? If thou canst come triumphant out of the ordeal, then farewell to this disgrace.

Rama then spoke, the words falling from her lips, like the roar of a lioness :—" What, my dear sister ! are you talking of the citizens of this town ? Call together the populace of the world, if you like, and, before that mass of life, will I be trumpeting forth the facts."

Nanda :—Wilt thou succeed ?

Rama :—Assuredly ; or I'll put a term to my life.

Nanda :—Then, let me go and get the King to arrange for a *darbar*. Now, then, a truce to weeping.

Nanda, then, rose and separated from her co-wife. Rama, also left her bed, wiped away the tears and, lifting her child into her arms, tenderly kissed it. Up till that moment, she did not do that even.

Nanda sent for the King, and, on his making his appearance in the inner apartment, she spoke to him about the scandal, that had been propagated and was on the lips of everybody. She, likewise, gave him a faithful and *verbatim* narrative of the conversation, that had taken place between herself and Rama. She at length said :—"With the extremity of our winding-sheet round our neck, and rolling in dust at thy feet (while thus speaking, Nanda actually put the extremity of her wrapper round her neck, and with both of her hands, she pressed both of her husband's feet) do we both of us entreat, that you preserve our honour—extricate us from this dire disgrace. Or else, with our own hands, will we terminate our own existence."

With a heart, heavy with affliction, arising out of the scandal as well as of his own conviction of the necessity of calling a *darbar*, as proposed by Nanda, Sitaram responded :—"The consort of a King, how am I to expose in a *darbar* ? How my own bride, shall I cause

to stand, awaiting trial, like a common woman of the town ?"

Nanda :—Of course we shall never see things, precisely in the same light as thou wilt. But is *that* more shameful, or the ill-reputation of a Queen, being a strumpet ?

Sitaram :—Such type of opprobrium has been handed down to ladies of sovereign rank by Sita. Were I to consult the time-honored custom on this point, I should quietly and unconcernedly abandon Rama, as Sita was by her husband. That alone may still the tongue of scandal.

Nanda :—O Sire ! you will abandon an innocent woman, and yet not investigate into her case ? Is this your regal justice ? Do you mean to enact what Ram Chandra did in the days of yore ? What was disespousal or espousal on the part of Him, who was the perfect Brahma ? But does it befit you, my Liege ?

Sitaram :—And, in the presence of the whole body of subjects, consisting, as it does, of friends and foes, the mass and the gentry, to cause my own spouse to stand like other prostitutes, do you not think 'twill rend my soul ? Verily, my bosom is not made of adamant !

Nanda :—When, in the presence of fifty thousand people, my Sovereign ! Sree danced on the branch of the tree, did your heart dilate with sentiments of pride ?

Sitaram darted a malignant look upon Nanda, and said :—"So it did, Nanda ! It afflicts me, that it has not recurred since."

Having received "tit for tat", Nanda asked for her husband's forgiveness with united palms of her hands. With clasped hands, Nanda got the better of it—Sitaram consented to call the *darbar*. He saw, that unless he did it, Rama could not elude being abandoned. But she was all innocence. As a matter of fact, a *darbar* was deemed exepedient.

With a heavy heart, the King now sought the presence of Chandrachoorh and questioned him as to the advisability or otherwise of the proposed *darbar*. A Brahman Pandit as he was, he had no respect for the zenana system. He, therefore, upheld the proposition. He was, however, afraid, that Rama would never succeed in speaking. On his own part also, Sitaram had a similar suspicion. That's why he, at first, was reluctant to call a *darbar*. He thought, if she failed, then everything would be lost.

CHAPTER II

Sitaram, then, caused the proclamation to be given, that in a full *darbar* would Gangaram be tried. At the order of the King, the citizens, to a soul, should attend to witness the proceedings. On receipt of the royal mandate, thousands and thousands of subjects poured in and filled the hall, on the appointed day. In imitation of the court at Delhi, Sitaram had caused a *darbar*-hall to be built. To-day it was highly decorated by the officers of State, who had spared no pains to carry out the object. Like the *darbar*-hall at Delhi, it was not provided with a silver canopy and fringes of pearls. It had, however, its canopy of silk, embroidered with lace. The columns were of mosaic work and wrapped in silk. The floor was covered with a thick soft carpet of variegated colours. On all the four sides, were arrayed armed soldiers, clad in gorgeous uniforms, while mounted officers maintained peace and order outside. Within the hall, and on a *dais*, built of white marble, was placed for Sitaram, a throne of silver, mounted with gold and ornamented with fringes of pearls.

Gradually the castle became filled with spectators. Inside the hall itself, were accommodated men of the higher spheres of society, whereas thousands and thousands of spectators, belonging to the lower grades, stood surrounding the hall and witnessed what was going on within, from their posts without.

Having observed the monster gathering from the open casement, that honourable lady of queenly rank, Nanda, sent for Rama to her own apartment, and, on her making her appearance there, she pointed out to her what was going on and asked :—"Well, how do you feel now ? Will you succeed in making your statement from the midst of the crowd down there ? Are you yourself enough ?

Rama :—If I am really devoted to the adoration of my husband, then, by all means, I shall be able.

Nanda :—Shall any one of us accompany you? If you so desire, I am ready to do so.

Rama :—Wherefore should you, also, plunge into this ocean of disgrace? None need accompany me. But, then, do one thing. When the moment for me to speak draws near, let somebody bring my baby close up to me. A glance at its features will inspire me with courage.

Nanda signified an acquiescence to the proposal and observed :—"Now, then, you are required to go into the court. Therefore, adjust your clothes a little. Do be prepared while yet there's time."

Rama agreed and repaired to her own suite of apartments. There, she shut herself up into her chamber and, rolling in dust with folded hands, began to pray :—"Victory attend upon thee, O Lucksh-minarayanji! Victory be unto thee, O Almighty! If, after speaking whatever I have got to speak to-day, I become for ever dumb, even that do I beg at thy hands! If, after giving utterance to my accents in court to-day, my tongue be deprived of the power of articulation for the remainder of my earthly days, even that is desirable to me! Shield me—Oh! shield me, I pray, from shame for this one day, and then I'll not murmur to die."

Then the thought of making alterations in her costume struck her. Rama procured for herself the garb of one of her maids; and slipping on it, she was about to walk into the court. Nanda observed it and said :—"Well, what's this?"

Rama answered :—"This is not a day for me to be decked out in a gala garb. Should the Almighty ever grant me a day to appear in gay apparels, then will I do so. Or else, these shall be my funeral shroud. Into the *darbar*, I will go with these clothes on."

Nanda saw the impressive truth of the argument and raised no objection.

CHAPTER III

In due time, the august King, Sitaram Ray, entered the *darbar*-hall and took his seat on the throne. The Nakib* trumpeted forth his panegyrics, but music was forbidden.

Gangaram, in heavy irons, was, then, escorted into the presence of the monarch. The crowd outside became impatient and stood on tiptoe to catch a glimpse of him. The officers of peace quieted them.

In a solemn tone, the King now addressed Gangaram and said :— "Gangaram ! thou art one of my friends, relatives and subjects. Moreover, thou art in my pay. I used to treat thee with utmost affection and favor. That thou didst enjoy the largest share of my confidence, is a popular belief. On one occasion, I went so far as to save thy life. After all these, what led thee to play the traitor ? Thou shalt be punished according to the laws of the land."

Mildly and in extreme humiliation, Gangaram responded :— "Somebody, hostilely disposed towards me, must have brought this charge, utterly unfounded though it is, at my door. An act of treachery, I have never committed. The King himself is trying me. I, therefore, hope, that without evidence, admissible under the doctrines of religious texts, he will not punish me."

The King :—It shall be as thou sayest. Listen to what evidence admissible under the tenets of the Sastras, has been secured, and answer them as best thou canst.

---

* One, who filled an office, nearly similar to that of heralds of English or Scottish courts.

And the King desired Chandrachoorh to state whatever he knew.

Chandrachoorh stated everything in detail. His deposition went to convince everybody, present in the *darbar*, that on the day when the Mahamedan army had been crossing the river, in order to invade the fort, in spite of Chandrachoorh's adjurations, Gangaram had not bestirred in the defence of the stronghold. When the holy gentleman brought his story to a conclusion, the King asked Gangaram :—"Villain! how dost thou mean to answer it?"

Gangaram clasped his hands and replied :—"This gentleman here is a priestly Brahman. What does he know of warfares? The Mahamedans never crossed the river, much less reached this side. Had they done so, and I, not repulsed them, in that case, the utterances of the venerable gentleman might have carried certain weight. I myself occupy apartments in the citadel, my Liege! What good might I have derived from its destruction?"

The King :—That, thou art soon to hear from another.

And he motioned Chand Shaha Faquir to relate his story.

The mendicant detailed whatever he was aware of, as to Gangaram's call upon Torab Khan, on the preceding night.

The King asked Gangaram :—"How dost thou account for this, sirrah?"

Gangaram answered :—"Verily, on the night in question, I saw Torab Khan. My object was, that, under the guise of a traitor, I would inveigh him into an intricate way, and then, when I had brought him as far as below the fort, I would crush him to death."

The King :—And didst thou ask Torab Khan for anything in requitement of your services?"

Gangaram :—Or else, why should he have believed me?

The King :—Pray, what reward didst thou crave?

Gangaram :—Half the dominion.

The King :—Anything else?

Gangaram :—Nothing else.

The King, then, questioned Chand Shaha Faquir :—"Do you know anything of that, Sir?"

Chand :—I do.

The King :—And how came you to know it?

Chand :—I am a Mahamedan mendicant. I used to go upon

occasional visits to Torab Khan. He, too, held me in great esteem. I never spoke anything of him to your Highness, nor of your Highness to him. That's why I was not regarded as belonging to a particular party. Now that he is dead and gone, the matter is widely different. On the day, when vanquished and repulsed by your Highness, he was flying from the bank of the Madhumati, we fell in with each other on the way. We soon fell into conversation regarding Gangaram's treachery. Of his own accord, he spoke to me all about it, on the supposition, that Gangaram had made a dupe of him. True, that Gangaram had asked for half the kingdom as his reward. But he had wanted something else. I am, however, afraid I shall risk your Highness' displeasure by acquainting you with it. Without assurance of pardon, I cannot bring myself to let your Highness into it."

The King :—Proceed ; do not mind me.

Chand :—The second reward, which he had demanded, was your Highness' younger spouse."

The spactators, thereupon, yelled forth invectives upon Gangaram, and the words came hissing between their set teeth, like the roar of the ocean. The officers of peace restored order.

Gangaram went on :—" Tis highly impossible, my Sire ! I have got a wife—the fact is not unknown to your Highness. Moreover, I am the Lord Mayor ; had I any appetite for the fairer sex very few, indeed, would have been beyond my reach. Never, in my life, have I seen the younger Queen. Wherefore should I have longed to possess her ?"

The King :—Then why didst thou visit the inner apartment of my mansion sneakingly like a dog, during the still hours of the night ?

Gangaram :—Never.

At this stage of the case, the warder Pande was summoned. Wagging his jaws, this worthy deposed, that in company with Moorala, and passing for her brother, Gangaram used to penetrate into the zenana almost every night.

Gangaram said :— " It is not at all likely, my Sovereign ! Why should he have allowed even Moorala's brother to enter ?"

The worthy Pande, thereupon, went on to say, that he knew

Gangaram well enough. But then how could he have resisted the Lord Mayor? That's why he had winked at it.

Gangaram saw, that he was going out of the "frying pan into the fire." One hope, however, yet buoyed him up, Moorala should never dare confess these things. For such a confession would only entail penalty on herself. Did she not tremble for her own life? He, accordingly, said:—"Let Moorala be summoned, and the falsity of the imputation shall be made patent enough."

Poor fellow! Little did he imagine, that the honorable lady of queenly rank, Nanda, had already won the abigail over to her own side. Nanda had explained the matter to Moorala and said:—"The King never executes a woman. Thou hast, therefore, no fear of death. Nor does he subject one of the weaker sex to any corporal punishment. So, thou hast no risk of any heavy penalty. Some sort of chastisement, however, thou shalt, as a matter of course, be subjected to. But, then, if thou speakest the truth, thou shalt be allowed to depart with a lighter castigation."

Moorala had realized the truth of it. She, therefore, now made a clean breast of everything, not omitting a single tittle.

On Moorala's deposition, Gangaram thought as if he had been struck by the lightning on the head. Still, however, he could not banish hope altogether. He said:—"This woman, my Liege! is highly depraved. Several times, have I detected her on the town. Some punishments, too, had, on certain occasions, to be dealt. She has, therefore, now come forward to peach out of spite."

The king:—Whom, then, are we to rely upon, Gangaram? Does the illustrious Queen herself deserve belief?

Gangaram imagined, that the portals of heaven stood suddenly open before him. He felt sure, that Rama would not, for the life of her, appear in court, nor would she succeed in giving vent to all those things. He, therefore, replied:—"To be sure! If her statements stamp me as guilty, then subject me, by all means, to condign punishment."

The King now flung his eyes towards the female apartment. Gangaram saw, that, with slow, and faltering steps like those of an affrighted child, a meanly-attired and veiled woman was proceeding towards the *darbar*. The beauty, that was engraved upon every bone

of his skeleton—that beauty—Gangaram recognized in a moment. Gangaram was terribly unmanned. The spectators burst out into great hootings and yellings. The officers of peace, however, restored them to silence and order.

On entering the *darbar*, Rama fell to the ground and, rolling in dust, while yet at a distance, she made her obeisance to the King first. She, then, did the same in respect to her spiritual preceptor, Chandrachoorh. Then throwing back the veil, she exposed her countenance before the assembly. In the meanest garb imaginable, her loveliness was too great to be effectually concealed beneath it. Chandrachoorh perceived, that the King wished to speak; but his thoughts could not find expression in words, his countenance was downcast. Chandrachoorh said to Rama :—"Your Highness! here are we going on with the trial of Gangaram. Did this fellow ever penetrate into thy apartment? If so, wherefore? What dialogue passed between ye? These facts thou must mention as accurately as one may do. The King commands thee as also I, who am thy spiritual guide. So, pray, proceed without seeking to disguise the truth."

With her head erect, Rama said to her spiritual preceptor :—"The mate of a sovereign never condescends to falsehoods. Had we been untruthful, this throne would, ere this, have fallen into pieces."

Amidst loud and prolonged cheers, the spectators exclaimed :—"Triumph attend upon the august Queen!"

Rama's courage was rather enhanced, and she went on :—"What, the deuce, am I to speak, O Venerable Preceptor! I am the companion of a King's life. He, who is the servant of the King, is in duty bound to serve me. Is it not his duty to obey whatsoever injunction I may deign to pass upon him? In the interest of a better performance of public duties, I summoned the Mayor into my presence. The functionary came and attended to what I imparted to him, and went away. Wherefore is this ceremony of a formal trial for that, and what, on earth, am I to speak?"

This address of Rama, did not, however, elicit cheers from the assembled spectators. A good many felt a sickening sensation at heart, while others murmured in an audible tone :—"This is a

confession after all." Chandrachoorh asked :—"What were the public duties, my child ! that called for the presence of the Mayor, in thy quarters at night ?"

Rama said :—"Then, pray, hear me out." And she turned her eyes to see if her child was there. She saw, that the well-dressed infant was in the arms of its nurse. A glance at its features reviving her courage, she proceeded with all the particulars of her meeting with Gangaram, as recorded in a preceding chapter."

At first, very low and faint, like a far distant music, she began the story. But her accents were scarcely audible. The whole multitude outside the hall, therefore, cried :—"Honorable Lady ! we can't hear, while we are dying to hear." Rama then grew a little louder, then still louder, and then yet louder. At length, when she began to convince her audience, that trembling for the safety of her offspring's life, she had done so, when, every now and then, she flung a hurried glance at its charming countenance, and in the midst of a flood of tears, manifested exuberance over exuberance, and wave after wave of maternal affection, her utterances struck upon the ears of her audience like a purely celestial and soul-ravishing song, blending together all the notes of the three scales of music, and putting the divinest symphony to shame. Then hastily snatching the child from off its nurse, Rama threw it at Sitaram's feet, and, uniting the palms of her hands, she resumed :—"You 've got other children, my Liege ! But this is my only one. You have got your diadem ; mine is this babe. You have got your religion, your actions, your reputation ; you have likewise got the ambition to go to heaven. But from the profundities of my heart do I declare, that this brat here is my religion, 'tis my action, 'tis my reputation, 'tis likewise my heaven. If I have violated my womanly vows, my Liege ! punish me—by all means punish me."

Thereupon, with eyes, brimful with tears, the spectators, burst forth into repeated cheers. But in a flock there are black sheep as well as white, and such proved to be the case with the present assembly. A large number of spectators joined in the acclamation ; but others did not. When the cheers did a little subside, somebody was heard murmuring :—"I'faith ! I can't believe it." An aged woman was heard muttering :—"Shame ! She has got a man, conducted

into her bed-room at night, and yet she wants to pass as immaculate." Some one said:—"Let the King be deluded at it, if he chooses; but not we." Another said:—"If *she* can descend to this—she, who occupies a queenly rank—what shall we, poor people, not do?"

These remarks reached the ears of Sitaram, and he said to Rama:—"You see, the subject people do not all believe you!"

For a moment only, Rama drooped her head, and tears gushed in torrents from her eyes. She then recovered self-possession, and, raising her countenance, she addressed the King and rejoined:—"This popular scepticism leaves but one course open to me— I dare not live and desecrate your palace. Let, therefore, a pyre be fitted out. There, on that pyre, and before everybody present here, will I burn myself to death. The matter is, by no means, fraught with grief. The sorrow, arising out of the people, calling me infamous, co-terminates with my existence. But, I ask you, O Great King! do you, too, think me faithless? For, meseems, in that case," and again did the tears rain down her cheeks, "my death on the pyre will prove of but little avail. If you can bring yourself to proclaim in the presence of this aggregate mass of vitality, that you doubt not my purity, I will embrace the pyre, as if it were vested with elysian bliss. Here am I standing in the presence of my spiritual guide—my saviour in the next world. In his presence, and in the name of the God of my especial adoration, do I declare, that I'm not guilty. Here, likewise, am I in the presence of you, the husband of my heart, who, though but a mortal, is still to me an object of greater adoration, than my spiritual leader—than even the gods themselves. And in your presence, as also in your name, do I declare, that I am not faithless. Whatever worship I have ever made of Gods and of Brahmans alike as a woman, whatever alms I have given, whatever religious rites and austerities I have performed, let me be deprived of their benefit, if I have violated the vows of my bed. The piety, arising out of a woman, ministering to her husband's comforts, stands the highest. Of all men, you know best, how I have devoted myself, body and soul, to the consultation of your pleasures. And if I have, in any way, erred as a woman, let

me be deprived of the benefit, which awaits me in consequence of such piety. Whatever hopes and expectations, desires and wishes, I have cherished in my bosom in this world, may they, one and all, fail to attain the longed-for fulfilment, if I have deviated from the tracks of womanly virtue. In the life, Sire! of a woman, the piety as well as the bliss of being blessed with the company of the husband reigns supreme. And if I have dishonored your name, let me be for ever deprived of such happiness, so sweet to my sex in general. The son, for whose safety I have propagated this scandal, and compared to whom all other earthly things dwindle into utter insignificance in my eyes, if I have gone astray, let it be forbidden to me to gaze upon the features of that offspring of my bosom. What more shall I say, O Just Monarch? If I have, in any way been unmindful of my duty towards you, then let me be born a woman for ages and ages to come, and as a woman let me be deprived of the blissful enjoyment of feasting my eyes on the features of my husband and of my son."

Rama's further utterances were choked, and like a creeper severed from the roots, she fell heavily upon the floor and swooned away. The maids carried her between themselves into her own apartment. The child burst out crying, as it followed its parent in the arms of its nurse. Everybody present began to shed tears. Gangaram rattled the fetters, that held his hands and legs. The multitude, now agitated like a sea, over the surface whereof a hurricane had swept, raised a tremendous hue and cry. The guards failed to check them.

Thereupon, "let's see what Gangaram has got to say. Does he set down the version, we have just heard, as false? If he dares declare it untrue, then let's unite and cut him to pieces," voices like these emanated from every direction. Gangaram saw, that nothing would ensure his safety, unless, indeed, he could turn the course of popular reflection. Gangaram was a "knowing chap." He saw, that the King would simply echo the sentiments of popular decision. He, therefore, now addressed the King in accents, calculated to delude the assembled crowd.

"The question, August Sovereign!" he resumed, "is whether to rely upon a woman or upon me? That sceptre of yours, my

Liege! Was it secured by the wiles of the fair sex or by the prowess of officers of State, such as I am? Women, as a class, Your Highness! are only too liable to deviation from the paths of virtue, even the consorts of royalty not excepted. A queenly lady being led to err, it behoves the King to disespouse her. Faithful servants, however, can never forget themselves and their duties. But then, women, with a view to wipe away their own guilts, not unfrequently throw their burden on the shoulders of devoted service. Here's Her Highness. From whom she has had the nocturnal visits, the stigma whereof she's seeking to fasten upon me, nobody can certainly——Oh! Spare me, my Liege! Spare me!"

Gangaram could not conclude what he had begun. But highly terrified, he burst into the ejaculation of entreaty and, with the weight of an awful and crushing fear, he stood stupified and silent. Everybody present saw, that the fellow was quaking, as if stricken with palsy. Astonished and awe-stricken, the congregated assembly saw—and excellent picture! With long-descending locks of matted hair, with the body, draped with a piece of *gairic*,* and the frame, giving out a lustre, a female, resembling the Goddess Durga herself, was hastily cutting across the hall, levelling the point of the trident, she carried, at Gangaram. A dead silence, thereupon, fell upon that vast assembly, agitated, a moment before, like an ocean. Gangaram had encountered the form on a certain night. And again, at that perilous moment, when he was striving thus artfully, to effect the ruin of innocent Rama, the sudden appearance, at such a moment, of the identical figure, he naturally set down as the apparition of the Goddess Chandi, dropped there to kill him. And overwhelmed with fear, he exclaimed:—"Oh! spare me, spare me!" The King, on the one hand, and Chandrachoorh, on the other, recognized that divine shape, they had seen one night; and taking her to be the Tutelary Goddess of the town, out of veneration left their seats. Everybody, present in court, followed suit.

Yayanti looked neither to the left nor to the right; but hastily approaching Gangaram, she placed the point of her trident

* *Gairic* is an orange-coloured cloth.

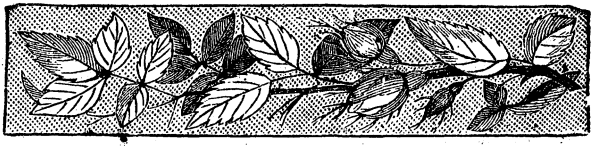
upon his bosom. The only words, she uttered, were :—" And now speak."

The trident only touched Gangaram's body ; yet he felt, that his life was ebbing out of him. She imagined, that one falsehood in addition, and the weapon would pierce him through the heart. And over-awed and crest-fallen, he now commenced the true story before the multitude. Throughout the time, he was thus occupied, Yayanti did not, even for a moment, take the point of the trident off his bosom. Gangaram now disclosed everything. Rama's innocence, his own infatuation, his lust, his interview with the Fauzdar, his conference with that functionary, and his attempt at treachery—in short everything—he now stated in detail.

Yayanti, then, withdrew the trident and quickly quitted the hall. At the moment of her departure, everybody present bowed his head before that lady, who, in every respect, resembled a deity, and confounded himself with hurry to move out of her way. Nobody ventured to put her a question, much less to follow her. And none endeavoured to ascertain which direction she took.

After Yayanti had departed, the King addressed Gangaram and said :—"From thy own lips, now comes the confession of thy crime. For such a traitor as thou art, there's is no other penalty than that of death. Do, then, be prepared to die at the sentence of the court."

Against the royal mandate, Gangaram dared not raise his voice. The guards led him away. A stupendous consternation now seized the multitude, as the sentence of death was pronounced. In silence, they now bent their way homewards. Returning home everybody spoke in praise of Rama, as being the Goddess Luckshmi herself. Thus the stigma, which had settled on Rama's fair fame, was now removed.



CHAPTER IV

The King ordered Moorala to be denuded of all the capilary growth of her head, bathed in whey, and banished the town. The behest was carried out forthwith. At the time of her exit, a number of urchins and other facetious people followed her in knots, clapping their hands and singing ballads.

For an ingrate malefactor, like Gangaram, there was no punishment, provided by the Legislature of the day, except that of being impaled,* and he was, accordingly, sentenced to death by being fixed on the stake. It was, however, deemed prudent to put off the execution for a few days. For the coronation of the King was near at hand. By his own valour, had Sitaram established a Hindoo dominion and secured for himself a sovereign rank. But he had not yet been formally crowned a King. According to the Hindu Sastras, a coronation was a matter of necessity. When, therefore, Chandrachoorh had mentioned the fact, Sitaram had agreed. He imagined, that the subject people being treated to such a festive entertainment, loyalty might become deep-rooted in their bosom. It was, accordingly, resolved, that the proposed coronation should be attended with as much *eclat* as could be procured. Both Nanda and Chandrachoorh now represented to the King, that it were an evil omen to signalize the coronation with the execution of Gangaram. Even if it did not prove productive of positive evils, it would, certainly, chill and weigh down the enthusiasm of the people. The King approved of the proposition. The fact, underlying this

* A mode of putting offenders to death by subjecting them to slow and horrible tortures.

ready acquiescence on the royal part was, that Sitaram was inwardly loth to get Gangaram impaled. It was only for the performance of a regal part, as well as for the administration of justice, that he had deemed it a duty to pass the sentence. This inborn reluctance was due to the consanguinity that subsisted between Sree and Gangaram—the consanguinity of brother and sister. Sitaram had not yet succeeded in committing Sree to oblivion. But returning from an ineffectual hunt after her, he had determined to fix his mind upon matters of business and, thereby, to forget her. This was the reason, why he had settled his attention upon the kingdom. This was, likewise, the reason why he had gone to Delhi, had presented himself at the Imperial Court, and had received the *sanad*. It was, moreover, the reason, which had induced him to fight with so much zeal, to possess Bhusana, as well as to establish an undisputed sway all over the eastern part of Lower Bengal. But Sree was yet the Empress of his heart, and it was therefore, that a few days' respite was granted in the execution of Gangaram.

Preparations were, now, commenced for a splendid coronation. All was pomp—all pageant. People, from different parts of the country, collected and filled the capital. There came kings, officers of State, Brahmans, men of letters, professors, astrologers, the mass, the gentry, the invited, the uninvited as well as those, that were attracted by Dame Rumour, beggars, ascetics, the good-natured as also the ill-natured. In short, owing to the presence of men of every grade of society, there was no more room left in the town. Chief, among the occupation of this aggregate mass of life, was unrestrained banqueting. With the wastage of edibles and provendors like *loochis*, and *sandeshes*, and curds, the town became knee-deep in mud. In supplying leaves to the invited, to serve as their plates, the plantain trees, as a class in the kingdom, became denuded of their foliage. Fragments of earthen pots, and torn leaves nearly covered up the channel of the river Madhumati as well as of the moats of the fortress, while ceaseless music, accompanied by terpsichorean performances, produced heat even in juvenile brains.

One of the features of this coronation was charity. At times in his own hands, at times through those of his dependants, directed by himself, Sitaram was occupied the whole of the day, in distribu-

ting gold, silver, utensils of brass, and cloths. So immense was the influx of expectants of charity, that their number could not be disposed of during the day, and Sitaram was occupied till midnight, when he felt quite worn out. Having, then, charged the officers of State with the disposal of the remainder, he entered the female quarter for rest. But scarcely did he reach the vestibule, when he was surprised and awe-stricken to encounter the self-same gold-complexioned female, with a trident in hand, and resembling a goddess in all other respects.

In extreme devotion, the King prostrated himself in order to make his obeisance to her. He then said:—"Maternal Lady! in mercy tell me who thou art?"

Yayanti answered:—"I am a beggar-woman, Great King! Expectant of charity, I have now appeared before you!"

The King:—Wherefore mystify me Mother? That thou art a deity I have made out. Thou art Kamala* in person. Be propitiated with me.

Yayanti:—Potentate! I am a common-place woman. Or else, I should not have come in for alms. I'm told, that to-day you are giving away to everybody precisely what is asked for. True, mine is a towering ambition. But imagining, that with one, so very liberal as you are reported to be, my expectation shall never experience the mortification of a refusal, I have appeared in your presence.

The King:—There's nothing, O Godly Being! which I cannot give unto thee. On one occasion, thou didst save my kingdom, and on another my family honour. A deity or a mortal, from thee there's naught in this world, which I would withhold. And, therefore, thou hast simply to issue thy command as to what thou desirest, and I fetch it directly.

Yayanti:—Gangaram has been sentenced to death, my Sovereign! but not yet executed. So, here am I to beg his life at your hands.

The King:—Thou?

Yayanti:—Why, my Liege! What is the impossibility?

---

* One of the ten manifestations of the prime *Sakti* (Force).

The king !—Of all insignificant beings, Gangaram is the most insignificant. What has evoked thy sympathy in his behalf ?

Yayanti :—We are mendicants ; in our eyes all are equal.

The king :—But 'twas thyself, who sought to pierce him to death with the trident ! 'Twas for thy stepping in, that his villainous designs were twice detected. In good sooth, hadst thou not espoused the queen's cause out of mercy alone, he would never have confessed his crime and, as a matter of course, not sentenced to death ! Wherefore, after all this, dost thou wish it otherwise ?

Yayanti :—Potent Monarch ! because of the part, that I thus played in the matter, that I now beg his life at your hands. In order to enable the cause of justice to triumph, I see nothing even in the murder of a malefactor, from which the purest mind would recoil in aversion. But now that such a cause has been served, I pant for placing as great a distance between myself and the sin of man-slaughter as one may possibly do. The charity, therefore, I crave at your hands, is the life of Gangaram.

The king :—There's nothing, that I can't give thee. Thy request is, therefore, already complied with—Gangaram shall be released presently. But, Mother ! I cannot arrogate to myself the power of making thee a present, and a gift, I am not going to make thee. To thee, I'll sell Gangaram's life—thou must pay for it.

Yayanti :—(Smiling) What price am I to pay, Sire ? What treasure do the royal coffers want, and which the begger-woman can supply ?

The king :—The royal coffers want the king's own vitality. From thy place in the vicinage of the cannon at the head of the flight of stairs in the Madhumati, thou didst promise thou wouldst get me what I was looking for. Let me have that invaluable treasure, and in consideration of such a price, will I sell Gangaram's life to thee presently.

Yayanti :—What's that invaluable treasure, my liege ? Surely, you are well established in your dominion !

The king :—I ask for the treasure, for which I can give up the bauble of a diadem.

Yayanti :—And, pray, what is that?

The king :—My first wife, Sree, is my life, as it were. Thou art a deity, and may give anything. Grant me my life, and at that price purchase that of Gangaram.

Yayanti :—Is it ever possible, my liege? An exchange of the life of a vicious miscreant with that of a pious king of kings like yourself? A mine of gems for a broken shell!

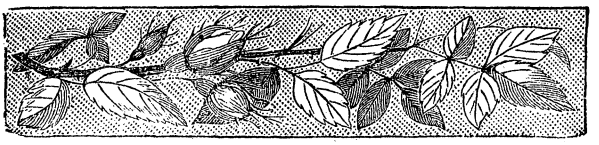
The king :—Mother! can a child ever presume to give as much as its parent can do?

Yayanti :—Let all the ingresses, my Sire! into the inner apartment be left open to-night. Let also the guards be directed to pass anybody, who may carry a trident. The price shall reach your bed-chamber to-night. And, now, for the release of Gangaram.

The king was mightily delighted to hear it. He said :—"Gangaram shall be set free directly," and he ordered the attendants accordingly.

Yayanti :—May I follow the domestics into the prison?

The king :—Thou art at liberty to do exactly as thou choosest. Nothing is forbidden to thee.



CHAPTER V

In a dark, subterranean-like low, damp and unventilated prison-cell lay Gangaram, prostrate under the weight of the heavy chains, that held him. Slumber had not visited him in that depth of night. From the moment the sentence, that he would be impaled, had been broken to him he had not slept—in fact, he had refrained from food and rest altogether. One can die in a moment. Death is not so heavy a penalty. But there is no punishment more terrible than captivity in a solitary prison-cell, in company only of one's own harrowing reflection, that one would have to pay the penalty of one's own crime by dying in a few days more. At every moment, Gangaram felt as if he had been undergoing the sentence of being impaled. As a matter of course, his sufferings had risen to their culminating point. Incessant moping extinguished his mental faculties. His mind itself seemed to be enveloped in a darkness, which had altogether blunted the capacity for feeling pain. Two feelings—only two feelings—were at present keen in his mind—fear of the Bhairabi, and vengeance against Rama. Of these two again, the latter was more deadly than the former. Gangaram was no longer attached to Rama. At that moment, Rama had not a more bitter enemy than Gangaram.

Gangaram was prepared to tear asunder Rama with his finger-nails. Whenever his mind recovered a little of the power of reflection, he called it into his own aid in order to devise schemes for effecting Rama's ruin at his last moment. Such lucid intervals, he would take advantage of, in thinking of how standing at the foot of the pale, he would impute the most disgustingly loathsome things to Rama. But generally for all the day long, he lay stupefied with the weight of an awful consternation, that had struck tnio his soul.

Now and then, the uproar, attendant upon the splendid coronation outside, would smite his ears. Enquiring of the Brahman cook, who used to fetch in his sorry fare, consisting of salt and boiled rice, Gangaram had come to know all about the festivity. He had heard, that the kingdom, from one end to the other, was absorbed in a very great merriment. Only he alone, eaten by rats and tortured by worms, was drooping beneath the weight of his chains, in that gloomy and saturated dungeon-cell. And he muttered to himself—"Oh! for the day, which shall see Rama reduced to such a plight!"

Like a flash of lightning in an overclouded sky, a thought struck him, and he ejaculated :—"Oh! that Sree lived!" Once Sree had successfully begged his life. If she did it again at the moment, would she not prove equally successful? How criminal soever he might be, he thought, Sree would never have abandoned him to his fate. Alas! that such a sister should have ceased to exist!"

'Twas midnight, when with a sharp clank, the chain on the outer side of the heavy gate of the dungeon was undone. Gangaram felt as if the very fountain of his existence had dried up. Wherefore were the portals of the prison opened at that hour of the night? Was there any fresh peril?

The officers of the prison first penetrated into the cell, with lights in their hands. Aghast with dismay, he sat glaring wildly at them; but he dared not put any question. No sooner, however, had his eyes encountered Yayanti, than he burst out into the ejaculation :—Oh! Save me; save me! What have I done?

Yayanti responded :—"Thou art well aware, my child! of what thou hast done. Nevertheless thou shalt be saved. Dost thou remember Sree?"

Gangaram :—Sree? Oh! that Sree lived!

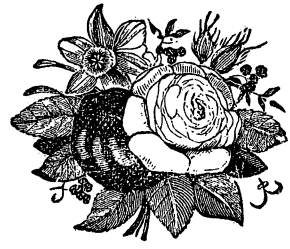
Yayanti :—Sree lives. Urged by her, I applied to the king in thy behalf, and asked for a reprieve and a pardon. My prayer has been granted. So here am I to liberate thee. Decamp, Gangaram! and let nobody discover thee in the town in the morning. For, in that case, it will be beyond our power to save thee.

Whether or not Gangaram understood what Yayanti told him

was doubtful. But certain it was, that he believed it not. He, however, saw, that the officers of the prison were undoing the fetters. He stood in silence. Then he asked :—Mother! hast thou really spared me?"

Yayanti responded :—"The manackles are taken off. Tramp off now."

Gangaram ran as fast as his legs could carry him. That very night he forsook the city.



CHAPTER VI

Having proclaimed the order for the release of Gangaram as well as the permission, in terms of Yayanti's command, to leave the doors, leading into the female apartment, open, the King now approached his bed-chamber and lay on the couch. Nanda instantaneously made her appearance and engaged herself in tending him. The King asked :—"How does Rama do?"

Rama lay on a sick couch. We will speak of it afterwards. Nanda responded :—"Alas! that I see no improvement!"

The King :—I am quite worn out and can ill afford to go and enquire after her, at this hour of the night. You, however, go, as my proxy, and take precisely as much care of her as I would have taken. Also tell her why I can't go.

The reader will no doubt wreathe his lips in scorn at these utterances of Sitaram's. But he was no longer the man of other times. Sitaram, who at one time had risked everything earthly for the foundation of a Hindoo dominion, subsequently engaged himself in a search for Sree, to the total exclusion of his administrative duties. Sitaram, who at one time, had sought, even at the cost of his own dear life, to save Gangaram's, simply because the latter had taken refuge in his intercession, now, in his avidity for the loveliness of Sree, released Gangaram, whom as a sovereign and as a Judge, he had only recently convicted. He, who, at one time, had loved his subjects, now loved his own self.

Nanda saw, that her husband longed for seclusion. Without, therefore, uttering a syllable, she retired. Sitaram, then, lay on the bed-stead and awaited the approach of Sree.

Having laboured, from an early hour in the morning till midnight, Sitaram was quite exhausted. Had it been on any other night, he would have fallen fast asleep as soon as he had approached the bed. But to-night it was widely different. In a few minutes, he would strain to his bosom a woman, in quest of whom he had traversed every country and every town, to the exclusion of the pleasure—or the burden—of the government, and whose memory was still consuming his heart itself like a flame.

On the other hand, Dame *Somnus* is always triumphant in the universe. However encompassed by perils one may be, slumber is sure to visit one sooner or later. Sitaram's situation was, by no means, a perilous one. He was wrapped up in a bliss, in which he had suffered his imagination to run riot. For a moment only, he felt drowsy. But somnolence does not last long in the face of mental excitement. After a few minutes, he was startled from his sleep. Opening his eyes, he encountered a desirable female with dishevelled hair, draped with a piece of *gairic* and decked with *rudraksha*.

At first Sitaram thought, it was Yayanti, and he eagerly questioned :—"Where is Sree?" But the next instant he discovered, it was not Yayanti, but Sree. No sooner had the identity thus flashed to his comprehension, than the King began to call out :—"Sree ! Sree ! O Sree ! my own Sree !" at the top of his voice and, raising himself in his bed, he extended his arms. But his brain swam ; he closed his eyes, and fell back on the bed. In a few moments, however, he recovered his consciousness.

With an upturned countenance and quivering balls of eyes, Sitaram fixed his unsatiated regards upon Sree. His lips were compressed, as if the thoughts could not find vent in the tongue, until the optics were gratified. In thus continuing to look on for sometime, his enraptured countenance lost some of its cheerfulness, and a sigh escaped him. The King had addressed her as his "own Sree." Perhaps he now made out, it was not his "own Sree." Perhaps, too, he made out, that the image, which seemed the very type and personification of calmness, which was endued with a tranquility that nothing could stir, which was perfectly unblemished with tears, which was surrounded with radiant rays

of beauty, and which was majestically dignified—such an image as this—was surely the image of a deity, not Sree!

Alack! silly Sitaram was searching for a queenly bride. What should he do with a deity?

CHAPTER VII

The King heard out Sree and Sree heard out the King. Sitaram told her, how, at the sacrifice of everything, he had roamed over the whole world, in hunt after Sree. Sree said something of her own history, but not all.

Sree then enquired :—"What am I required to do at present?"

The question started tears in Sitaram's eyes. "What am I required to do at present?" Was it the question upon getting into the husband's company after a livelong separation? Sitaram thought he should answer :—"You shall suspend a rope to the ceiling, and I'll put it round my neck and hang myself."

But instead of uttering these words, he said :—"I've been looking for a proper queen these five years. You are now to occupy that position, and illuminate the palace."

Sree :—Sire! I have heard enough of Nanda's excellent attributes. You are assuredly very fortunate in having got a lady like her for your queen. Desire not another."

Sitaram :—You are the eldest. Whatever may be the virtues of Nanda, wherefore should you not fill up your own place?"

Sree :—Time there was, when for becoming one of the partners of your throne, I might have resigned the position of Luckshmi herself in the highest of the empyrean regions. But those days are gone!

Sitaram :—What mean you? Wherefore gone, and by what means gone?

Sree :—I'm a *sannyasini*.* I have bid farewell to all mundane actions.

---

*A woman, who has entered the fourth order of religious life, prescribed for Brahmans.

Sitaram :—A woman, whose husband is living, has no access to *sannyas*. Your only piety is the tending of your husband.

Sree :—She, who has bid adieu to all earthly actions, ought no longer to look upon the tending of her husband as a duty—no, not the worship of her gods either.

Sitaram :—Nobody can effectually renounce all actions ; nor you yourself have succeeded in so doing. Have you not attended to a duty in saving Gangaram's life? Have you not likewise performed a part in paying this visit to me?

Sree :—I have ; and it has surely displaced me from *sannyas*. Do you mean to say, that I shall ever remain off the tracks of my godly avocation, because I've only once slipped away?

Sitaram :—Ah! the society of the husband entails sacrifice of piety on woman—does it? Who has imparted such an evil lesson to you? Well—but no matter. To counteract such a lesson lies with me, I'm your husband—I have authority over you. And in exercise of such an authority, I'll never allow you to depart.

Sree :—You are my husband as well as my sovereign. Moreover, you are the benefactor and I, the reaper of the benefit. Unless, therefore, you allow, I cannot, as a matter of course, part company with you.

Sitaram :—Well, I'm the husband, the king and the benefactor. Unless, therefore, I permit, you can't separate. Wherefore not say, that I love you and unless, indeed, I leave you, you can't go away? How to snap the golden chain of affection?

Sree :—That spell, my Liege! has ceased to exercise its influence. Now I have realized, that he, who loves, thereby secures both piety and pleasure. But of what avail is the passion to its recipient? Make an idol of clay, and offer sandal juice and flowers to it ; you will secure piety and pleasure. But what's the value of the offerings to the idol itself?

Sitaram :—Oh! what horrible sentiments?

Sree :—Not a bit horrible, but ambrosial. God is present in everything. Love towards Him is the only piety or pleasure of creatures. 'Tis therefore, that universal love is enjoined on them. But God is free from the pairs of opposites. To Him, pleasure and pain are all the same. To the soul also, which is a part of God, and which *is*

present in creatures, the case is, by no means, different. The love, of which we make Him the object, neither pleases nor hurts Him. Still, however, that we feel happy, dispite this truth, when anybody loves us, is only the promptings of Illusion.

Sitaram :—Sree ! I see, under the tutelage of some hypocritical *sannayasin* you have got by *rote* some worthless sentiments, out of a feminine intellect. For women, however, they are, by no means, wholesome. What are really salutary I'll tell you presently. Pray listen to me. I have led you to the altar. My contiguity is your piety—there's naught else. I am likewise the ruler. The duty of a monarch is to protect the piety of everybody. It is also the duty of a husband to induce his wife into the paths of piety. Towards your piety, therefore, I'll direct your mind. I'll not suffer you to depart.

Sree :—Well, as I have already said, you are my husband, my king and my benefactor. Your command is to be obeyed in season and out of season. However, permit me to tell you this much beforehand, that, you'll never be happy in my company.

Sitaram :—Let's meet each other, and I shall be happy.

Sree :—One more prayer and I've done. Since I am thus compelled to re-enter the domestic sphere, you will kindly cause a little hut to be erected for me, instead of assigning me a place within this palatial lodge. I am a *sannyasini*. Not for a moment, shall I feel myself at home in a royal abode, whereas by inhabiting it, I shall simply draw down, upon my own head, the bitterness of popular ridicule.

Sitaram :—And the harbouring of the king's mate in a lowly hut will not be the theme of general taunts ?

Sree :—Let nobody know, that 'tis a king's bride.

Sitaram :—Shall I not visit you ?

Sree :—That rests entirely with you.

Sitaram :—Well, I shall meet you, and yet you are not one of the queens. Do you know what the people will call you ?

Sree :—Assuredly I do. The people will call me the mistress of royalty. I am a *sannyasini*, my Liege ! In me the feelings of honour and dishonour are quite dead. Let the people have their own way. My honour or dishonour is left entirely to your keeping.

Sitaram :—What do you mean ?

Sree :—I am the companion of your religious merits. Do not make use of me otherwise than for the ends of religion. The gratification of mere carnal appetites, save for such ends, is a sin. Mere enjoyment of creature-comforts is the occupation of brutes. The gods have not enjoined marriage merely for brutal purposes. Amongst the brutes there is no wedlock at all. Matrimony has, for its aim, the performance of religious rites. Royal sages never permitted themselves, to approach the couch of their brides, unless their souls were purified in the extreme. Thraldom to the senses is a sin. I will change this *gairic* drapery of mine, when I shall have seen you able to converse with me with an untainted soul and free from vice. But so long, my Sovereign ! as I do not put aside this dyed frippery of mine, you shall occupy a separate seat.

Sitaram :—I am your lord, and my voice shall predominate.

Sree :—So it may, once, because you are the stronger. But I, also, have got a strength. I inhabit the wilderness. There persons of my pursuits in life are naturally encompassed by perils. And perils there are, escape from which is altogether out of the question. To provide, therefore, against moments of such extreme cases, we keep poison with ourselves, and I have got it with me. I will swallow it in case of necessity.

Good Heavens ! Can this Sree be Sitaram's own Sree ?

CHAPTER VIII

Sitaram did not permit himself to realize the truth. His mind refused to grasp it. When an object of one's love dies, one remains in the vicinity of the dead. For sometime, one cannot bring one's self to believe, that respiration has ceased. Like demented Lear, one moves about to look for a mirror to see whether breath causes the vapour to gather on its surface or not. For a livelong year, had Sitaram created an ideal Sree in his own mind and adored it. Whatever might be the case with the external Sree, the internal one remained unaltered. But 'twas the external Sree herself, whom Sitaram had locked in his heart. That external Sree it was, who now stood before him. In what respect was she different from the one, treasured in the bosom ? Sitaram could not, for an instant even, bear thought, that there was difference. Whatever may be the other convictions of individuals, they seem to think that human nature exists the same in the various stages of life. We do not seem to conceive, how often people are born anew in the same material frame. Sitaram, also, did not see, that his own Sree had ceased to be the denizen of this world, and, in her material frame, another Sree had sprung up. He imagined, that his "own Sree" was yet his "own Sree." That's why he never turned an attentive ear to Sree's vehement utterances—indeed he dared not do it. For the resignation of Sree would bring in its train the renunciation of everything.

However, nothing could induce Sree to tenant the palace. Sitaram, then, assigned the little, yet charming, villa, named *Chitta visram* * for her abode. There Sree spread a tiger's skin and sat on

*Mind's repose.

it. The king daily visited at the villa. Occupying a separate seat, he held a few minutes' discourse with her, and then came home. But for the king, it brought about very venomous consequences.

Imagine for yourself, reader, the nature of the conference! The king spoke of love; he spoke of the misery, he had so long undergone in consequence of the absence of Sree. He said, that without Sree, his life knew not a moment's bliss. He also said, how he had sent an army of emissaries to the different parts of the kingdom, and how he had himself instituted the search. Sree told him the stories of innumerable mountains, of countless forests, of numerous wild beasts, and birds, and fruits and roots. She likewise spoke of *Yatis*,* and *Paramhangshas*,† and *Brahmacharis*,‡ of religions and irreligions, of actions as well as inactions, of a number of Pauranic tales, of good many native rulers as well as foreign ones, of various customs and manners.

This uninterrupted attention to tales, though occupying a different seat, rendered the monarch's situation perilous in the highest degree. The conversation was highly fascinating. She who conversed was more fascinating still. The fire had already flamed up. Now it caught the dwelling. Sree was all along captivating. Sree, who, standing on the branch of a tree, had won the battle at the signal of the disengaged extremity of her wrap—that Sree—was thrown into the shade in point of loveliness in the presence of this Sree. Physical health as well as mental purity bring on a responsive enhancement in personal charms. Sree's physical health as well as mental purity had increased hundred-fold. As a matter of fact, they had brought in their train a corresponding increase in her personal attractions. Like the health of a morning flower, just opening its bud—not in the slightest degree undeveloped, nowhere deficient in any of its features, nowhere discoloured, nowhere sun-burnt, but all over smooth, perfectly cool and in glorious hues—was the

* Ascetics.

† An ascetic, who has controlled and subdued his mind by abstract meditation.

‡ A Brahman, in the first order of life, who continues to live with his spiritual guide, from the investiture with the sacred thread, and performs his duties, pertaining to his order, till he be settled in life.

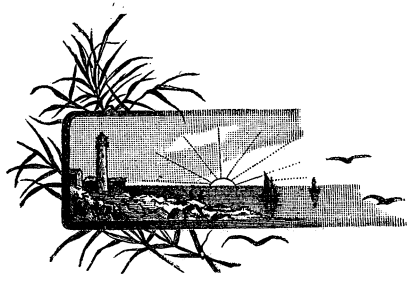
health of Sree—her limbs were fully developed. Sree was, therefore, the personification of natural charms. Besides, her mind was serene, devoid of the raging of passions, free from cares, free from longings, full of devotion, full of love, full of the milk of human kindliness. Such being the facts, such type of beauty was beyond perversion—not a line of misery perceptible, not a shade of animal appetites, not a mark of care;—everywhere sweet, smiling and happy. Can the image of the lion-bestriding goddess occupy a place by the side of this image of Bhubaneswari? * Then that fascinating conversation—of various countries—various subjects—various unheard of topics;—at times provoking curiosity, at times entertaining the mind, at times pregnant with wisdom. These two spells being united, what security could be guaranteed for a man, having no control over his senses? The fire had blazed up long ago. Now it caught Sitaram's dwelling. It was Sree, who brought about Sitaram's total ruin.

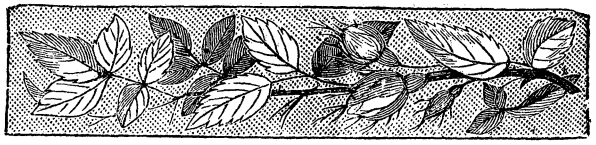
Formerly, Sitaram used to visit at *Chittavisram* every evening. After conversing with Sree for about a couple of hours or so, he withdrew. As time wore on, he became later and later everyday. Though occupying a different seat, the king could not return home, unless assailed by hunger and sleep. This state of things proved uncomfortable. Sitaram, accordingly, made arrangements for his nocturnal meal and bed at the villa. But 'twas in a separate chamber, that his table was spread and his bed prepared—the vicinity of Sree's tiger's skin he could not approach at all. This partial enjoyment of Sree's company, however, was rather tantalizing to the king, and he grew yet later in returning to the palace in the morning. He could not quit *Chittavisram* without discoursing for a few moments with Sree, even in that early part of the day. Thus when the king grew very late, he made arrangements for his dinner at the villa. Enjoying an hour's after-dinner nap, he would present at the palace in the afternoon, to attend to the duties of the throne. Later on, his attendance to the duties of the administration became irregular. Still later, things came to the stage, that whenever the monarch visited at the palace, he came back after looking hither and thither

*One of the ten manifestations of the prime Sakti (Force).

for a few moments only. He could not stay long away from *Chittavisram.* At length the villa became the king's regular abode. To the palace, he only occasionally dropped for a change of scene.

On the other hand, nobody had permission to penetrate into *Chittavisram* on business. Its inner apartment was impervious even to insects and flies. As a matter of fact, the relation between the king and the regal duties almost came to an end.





CHAPTER IX

Ramchand and Shamchand, two innocent members of the middle class, inhabited Mahammadpur. One morning, in the lonely *Chandimandap** of Ramchand, and over the smoke of tobacco, the two were engaged in earnest conversation. A portion of the dialogue, the reader must hear.

Ram :—Well, brother! can you tell me, what's this matter of *Chittavisram*?

Sham :—As a matter of fact, brother! these things are only too common among personages of sovereign rank. And, as I think of it, who, in our own sphere, is excepted? What's the use of talking of kings and princes? But credit must be given to our august monarch—his quantum is very small; this is the only one.

Ram :—Assuredly so. But, then, our ruler never seemed inclined to things like these; he was rather pious to the back-bone. That's what sets me catechising. In fact, there was no such thing till lately!

Sham :—They say, the king is no longer what he was. But of a surety, men cannot lead a uniform course of life all through. With the increase of wealth and elevation of rank, the mind loses its pristine condition. Formerly we were, so to speak, as happy and contented as people in the government of Ram. But whether the same state of things continues even now, is what I have yet to learn!

*A large hut, walled on three sides, but open in front, erected in the outer part of the house of a lower middle class Hindoo, in which periodical worships of idols are performed, and which, on other occasions, is used as a drawing room for the reception of guests.

Ram :—Quite so! To my mind it seems, that since the beginning of this accursed affair of *Chittavisram's*, the state of things have taken rapid strides. However, to enmesh the king in this way is not an ordinary affair! The woman is, by no means, a common-place one! Dropped, as it were, from the clouds, she has established her empire here!

Sham :—I have been told, she is a Bhairabi, or some such thing. Some people say, she is a witch. Witches are possessed of full many a spell. By means of such witcheries, the one here metamorphoses herself into a Bhairabi and moves about. Others affirm, she has got a counterpart. The latter moves about in the air, and nobody encounters her.

Ram :—Then protect us Heaven! The kingdom in the grip of a witch! Do you imagine, there is any good in store for it?

Sham :—All considered it appears so! The king no longer attends to the duties of the administration. The reverend Tarkalankara is all in all. But what does he know of battles and contentions? On the other hand, 'tis, rumoured, that the Nawab's force will soon appear.

Ram :—If ever it comes, there's Mrinmaya here to meet it?

Sham :—Faugh! Is it a task, to be entrusted to other people? A duty befits him, to whom it legitimately belongs; but for others, 'tis fraught with the blows of a bludgeon, as it were. The deeds of Gangaram Dass must yet be green in your memory. Who knows, what Mrinmaya may do again? If he sides with the enemies, where should we rest our heads? Certainly, a wholesale carnage awaits our fate!

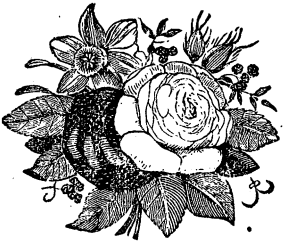
Ram :—Such seems, indeed, to be our situation! That's why, one by one, people have commenced to give us the slip. The other day, Tilak Ghose, with his family, removed to Jessore. At the moment, the matter did not strike me as singular. When I questioned him, wherefore was he removing? he returned :—"The prices of commodities have gone up here." Just at this moment, a few families, from our neighbourhood, have also left.

Sham :—Well, then, brother! between you and me, I will clear out very soon.

Ram :—Indeed! Wherefore should I, then, loiter behind to be

surely put to the sword? But, then, the thing is, these houses and dwellings have been erected at no end of expenses. For a poor devil like myself, it is very very difficult to abandon them and go elsewhere.

Sham:—But circumstances make it imperative—do they not? Which is more valuable—life, on the one hand, or houses and dwellings, on the other? Very well; should the kingdom be saved, we'll come back. Surely, our old haunts will not run away!



CHAPTER X

Sree :—You are constantly in *Chittavisram*, my Liege! Who attends to the duties of the government?

Sitaram :—To me, thou art worth a crown. Is a diadem as sweet as thou art?

Sree :—Shame, shame, my Liege! Is it for this, that you set your heart upon the foundation of a Hindoo dominion? Before me it dwindles into insignificance—does it? Setting aside your foremost duties, you attach greater importance to me! Is this King Sitaram Roy?

Sitaram :—But, as sure as anything, the kingdom is well established!

Sree :—Will it last long enough in this state?

Sitaram :—Who wields the power to destroy it?

Sree :—You are the person to destroy it! The sceptre of a king is just the same thing as a widow's self-abnegation. The one demands as careful a preservation as the other.

Sitaram :—But in which respect is such a preservation wanted?

Sree :—Do you ever look to the duties of the government? Of a certainty, I always find you in my presence!

Sitaram :—Well, you can't exactly say, that I do not, at all, attend to the duties of the administration. Almost every day, I present myself at the palace. A glance of mine is sure to achieve what may cost others their whole day's attention. Besides, there is the

holy Tarkalankara—there is Mrinmaya. Both of them are very able ; and so long as they are here, well may I give myself the holiday.

Sree :—But certainly; on one occasion, the kingdom was on the point of being lost in spite of them, and if you had not dropped in accidentally that night, it would have gone ! Wherfore, then, depend solely upon them again ?

Sitaram :—Of a verity, I am present here—never budge an inch ! Should danger befall again, I will succour !

Sree :—So long as you continue to buoy yourself up with such a confidence, you shall never be doing anything in right earnest. Without earnestness nothing can be achieved.

Sitaram :—In what respect do you find me lacking in earnestness.

Sree :—Well, I belong to the weaker sex and to the order of asceticism. Of the duties of administration, I understand too little to be able to vouchsafe a proper reply to your query. But one thing alarms me very much. Have you learned anything of the affairs at Moorsidabad ? Torab khan is gone—the supremacy over the twelve landlords has, inch by inch, slipped beneath the feet. Is the Nawab the man to swallow these indignities in silence ?

Sitaram :—Oh ! do not give thyself any fidget on that account. So long as Moorsidcooli receives the government revenue in due time, he will not care for anything else.

Sree :—But does he get it ?

Sitaram :—Its remittance, in due time, is well provided for. But the last instalment was not paid—the expenses incurred had come to such a large figure !

Sree :—Then do you yet mean to say he will sleep over it ?

Sitaram cast down his head, and there ensued moments of dead silence, after which his voice again vibrated upon Sree's ears, ejaculating :—" Oh ! what does he contemplate, or what is he, in fact, doing, I have certainly taken no note of !"

Sree :—Illustrious Monarch ! have you forgotten to ascertain it, because of your occupation of *Chittavisram* at present ?

Sitaram reflected for sometime and then replied :—" It seems so. Thy features, Sree, crush everything else out of my mind ! "

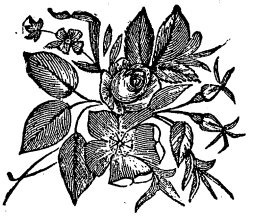
Sree :—Then I have a prayer—this accursed countenance of

mine must needs be hidden again. Or else it will only bring ignominy on the name of Sitaram Roy—it will cause a just government to fall to pieces. Permit me to re-enter the wilderness.

Sitaram :—Come what may! I have well weighed the matter—either I must renounce thee, or else, the kingdom. But I prefer parting with the crown. From thee, I dare not separate myself.

Sree :—Do so, then. Place the diadem on some deserving brow and, embracing asceticism, follow me into the wilderness.

For sometime, Sitaram shut himself up into a reflection. Animal appetites were predominant in the bosom of the king. Had it been the former times, Sitaram might easily have given up his sceptre. But he was no longer himself. Enjoyment of royal pleasures, contaminated Sitaram's soul. He could not call into his own aid, a sufficient amount of courage to tear himself away from his sovereign rank.



CHAPTER XI

A pretty long time elapsed since the day, when Rama had fallen on the pavement of the *darbar*-hall and fainted. The maids had carried her between themselves, and put her into the bed. Since that day, Rama had not quitted her couch. At the risk of her life, she had recovered her reputation. Her fair fame was extricated, but her life seemed imperilled.

The malady had become chronic. Let us review the case from the outset. It was the partner of a monarch's couch, who lay on a sick-bed. As a matter of fact, her treatment was, by no means, neglected. From the very beginning, physicians had begun to call frequently. In the royal establishment, there was a number of physicians. They had no occupation worth the name. Their days were generally whiled away in doling out aphrodisiacs to the men-servents, and cordials and restoratives to the maids Now, however, that they had got the younger queen as their patient, they became, all on a sudden personages of great importance. Everybody now began to rack his brain to arrive at the true diagnosis. The officers of the royal household became literally wearied with the definitions of distempers like fainting fit. wind, acidity with bile, heart-disease and so forth, with which the physicians sought to regale their ears. Some one took refuge in the *Nidana** another, in *Bahbhat*,† the third recited *Charaka*,‡ while the fourth vented forth the annotations of *Susruta*.§ The malady, however, was left undetected.

---

* Nidan is a compilation by Madhub Kar and treats of symptoms, causes, and pathology of diseases.

† A system of medicine, treating of symptoms, causes, and treatment of diseases.

‡One of the several branches of the Hindoo Ayurveda system, named, Charak-Sanghita, annotated by Chakrapani and others.

§Another branch of the Ayurveda system, named, Susruta-Sanghita, annotated by Maharshi Dallanacharya and others and treats of surgery.

But we do not do so great an injustice to the physicians as to affirm, that they contended themselves only with reciting medical texts. They prescribed a long list of medicaments. Some body gave pills ; another, powder ; the third, a cerate ; while the fourth, an oil. Some of the physicians demanded the preparation of new medicines. Another said, that the already compounded ones, that he had got with him, were matchless. Be that as it may. It was the household of a sovereign, and the patient was one of the queens. Whether the necessity for the preparation of fresh medicines was really felt or not, 'twas highly improbable that new ones should not be prepared. For their preparation was sure to put a few coins into the pocket of several persons. As a matter of course, the whole house wore the the appearance of animation over the preparation of new medicaments. Here, a quantity of roots was ground in the mortar ; there, barks were pounded in the husking machine ; yonder, something was being boiled in a pot ; while farther away, some purifying ingredients were thrown into the earthen caldron, in which simmered a certain kind of oil. Having observed all these proceedings, one of the female domestics of the house, one day burst out into the ejaculation :—"Oh! that I may occupy the position of a queen and then lie on a sick bed !"

But the medicaments stood in no relationship with the one for whom they were compounded with so much zeal—in fact she never saw their colour. Not that the physicians did not supply medicines. No, they were not deficient in the quality of supplying them. But all their good intentions proved fruitless. And for this, Rama was solely to blame—she would not take them. Moorala was replaced by a woman, named Yamuna, to act as Rama's principal maid. Nanda had appointed this woman, because Yamuna was comparatively advanced in years. We, however, do not pledge ourselves to the fact, that Yamuna ever admitted herself being old in age. On the contrary, we are aware, that a certain of the royal domestics entertained a diametrically opposite view. Still, however, the fact is, that Yamuna gave herself the air of a woman on the shady side of existence, and treated Rama with utmost consideration. That the invalid was duly ministered unto was her particular care. The remedies, which the physicians supplied, generally came to her hands.

She was, likewise, charged with the duty of causing the prophylactics to be imbibed by the patient. She, however, proved quite unequal to the task. Nothing could induce Rama to take them.

On the other hand, instead of progressing favourably, the malady became more and more chronic every day, till, at last, Rama was quite prostrate on her bed. Thereupon Yamuna's resolve was taken—she would seek the presence of the elder queen and tell her everything. She, therefore, said :—"I'm going to the elder queen—let her come in person and cause you to take the medicines."

Rama responded :—"Minion! wherefore persecute me at the moment of my dissolution? Rather let us come to certain terms."

Yamuna enquired :—"What are the terms, my lady?

Rama :—Will you sell these medicines of yours to me? I'm prepared to pay a rupee for each of the pills!

Yam :—What do you mean, my dear madam? These medicines are your own property. How am *I* to sell them to you?

Rama :—If you give me these medicaments for considerations of money, you will cease to have any right in them. Whether I take them or not, in either case your tongue shall be stilled!

For a while, the *soubrette* fell into a reflection. Thought she within herself :—"This woman here is sure to kick the bucket, Wherefore should I suffer the blunts to slip through my fingers?" She, thereupon, declared :—"Well, then, my lady! if you really take them, what's there to prevent you from taking them, whether for money or not? If, however, you be resolved not to take them, what's the good of them, being left in my custody?"

The terms were accordingly agreed upon; Yamuna sold the remedies to Rama, and received the money. Of the medicines, a quantity Rama threw into the spit-box, and the remaining quantity, she thrust under the pillow. She could not raise herself to keep them elsewhere.

However, the finger of the Destroying Angel became more and more apparent every day. Nanda came daily to watch by her bed-side. After a few moments' conversation, she withdrew. Nanda observed, that Death had thrown his shadow. He, who had thus cast his shadow, was not far off. Nanda thought :—"Alas, that the physicians, attached to the palace staff, should be equally

influenced by the witch !" And Nanda at once summoned the whole army of physicians. Then, herself remaining behind a screen, she overwhelmed them with reproaches, on their making their appearance. She at length said :—Why receive monthly wages, if you can't cure a malady ?"

One of the physicians, who was advanced in age, replied :—"Your Highness ! physicians can but administer remedies, but not longivity."

Nanda :—In that case, we need neither the remedies, nor the physicians. You had better go back to your own native lands.

The physicians grew very much sad at heart. The old one was a sapient man. He said :—" Lady ! we have only to blame our own destinies, that things have taken such a turn. The remedies, I have supplied, are *Dhanwantari** himself. Even at this stage, I dare pledge myself to the cure of the malady within three days, if assured on but one point."

Nanda asked :—" And that one point ?"

Thy physician replied :—" Is that I shall cause the medicines to be imbibed in my own presence."

The old man's conviction was :—" The woman never takes the medicines. Does a patient, who takes my medicines, ever succumb ?"

To this proposition Nanda agreed, and she dismissed the physicians. Then approaching Rama, she told her everything. A subdued smile played on the latter's lips. Her mouth did not admit of a laughter—it was reduced to the greatest emaciation possible.

Nanda enquired :—" What provokes thy laughter ?"

With a similar smile, playing upon her lips, Rama replied :—" I'll not take the medicines."

Nanda :—No such thing, dearest sister ! Thou hast already taken a large quantity. Wherefore refuse to take for another three days ?

Rama :—I have taken no medicines.

Nanda started to hear this and said :—" Is it possible ? Not at all ?"

---

* An Indian sage, who founded one of the several branches of the Hindoo Ayurveda system.

Rama :—Every one of them is here—under this pillow.

Nanda turned the pillow and found, that there they certainly remained. She thereupon said :—Wherefore, sister ! seek to become a suicide now ? The evil has certainly fallen into oblivion !

Rama :—Well, then, I'll take the medicines, since you appear to wish it.

Nanda :—But when shall you take them ?

Rama :—When the king comes to watch by my bed-side.

And the tears streamed forth from her eyes. Nanda also turned to dash away a tear. Now-a.days Sitaram never enquired into the state of Rama's health. He had taken his abode exclusively in *Chittavisram.*

Nanda wiped away the rheum from her co-wife's eyes and said :—" Whenever he comes to the palace the next time, he shall come to enquire after thee."

CHAPTER XII

"Whenever he comes to the palace the next time, he shall come to enquire after thee," was the assurance, held out by Nanda, and upon this assurance Rama sustained herself, somehow or other. But now, perhaps, it proved too much for her—attenuated alike in body and mind—to do so any longer. Nanda was not oblivious of the assurance, she had held out, but kept it constantly in memory. She, however, could not find an opportunity to get the king's company. If, at any time, Nanda could get hold of her royal husband, he would say :—"Not to-day, but to-morrow," and the next instant he would be out of sight altogether. Nanda had registered a vow, in heaven, that not for worlds would she work herself up to passion against Sitaram. She thought:—"The king is certainly under the influeuce of a witch. But this fact shall never permit the "instruments of darkness" to assert their supremacy over me. Should the spectre of anger make me its victim, who would protect this household?" It was thus, that Nanda reasoned herself out of the influence of bitterness against Sitaram. But her wrath upon the witch knew no limits. That the witch was Sree, Nanda knew not. Indeed, to none, except to Sitaram himself, was the fact known. In order to glean the correct information, Nanda had sent her emissaries several times. But without Sitaram's permission not a fly even was allowed to cross the threshold of *Chittavisram.* As a matter of course, Nanda's endeavours were not crowned with success. But, then, a rumour was afloat, that the witch assumed the shape of a female of ravishing beauty, and performed all domestice duties by day; but at night she transformed herself into a she-jackal and ate of carcasses in one cemetry or the other. Very much affrighted, Nanda prayed

to the reverend Chandrachoorh, to ascertain the true state of affairs. Chandrachoorh invited *Tantric* Brahmans of great repute, and caused sacrificial rites to be performed for rescuing Sitaram. But nought could effect the destruction of the witch. At length the ablest of the *Tantric* Brahmans observed :—"Look here, no human agency can bring about the contemplated effect. This witch here is, by no means, a commonplace one, She is one of the companions of Bhawani* herself who dwells on the Kailas†.• She answers to the name of •Visalakshi. Falling a victim to the ire of Rudra,‡ she has been sent down upon the earth to while away a few days, as the partner of a mortal's bed. Directly the period of such mission terminates, she will, of her own accord, revert to her own place." Accordingly both Chandrachoorh and Nanda desisted from farther actions. But they did not pass their days the less anxiously. Nevertheless, every now and then, Nanda detected herself giving way to the reflection, that if she fell in with the witch, even if it was for a few minutes only, she would tear her with her finger nails, all Bhawani's campanion though the witch was.

For this reason, Nanda was not at all embittered against Sitaram. Sitaram also, did pay a visit to Nanda, whenever he came to the palace. On such occassions, Nanda acquainted him with all that concerned Rama. She told him how Rama was very miserable ; and she adjured him, in the name of Heaven, to go and enquire after her, even if it was for that once. So long had Sitaram succeeded in evading Nanda. To-day, however, she proved highly importunate. She said :—"Just go to-day, or it wlll be too late to meet her in this world."

Accordingly Sitaram repaired to Rama's chamber to enquire after her. On his making his appearance, Rama burst into a violent fit of weeping. But she was far from upbraiding her husband—her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. We know not, if Sitaram felt any remorse or not. Certain it is, that he soothed her and, in terms of affection, buoyed up her drooping spirits with the assurance of recovery. Gradually, the features of Rama relaxed

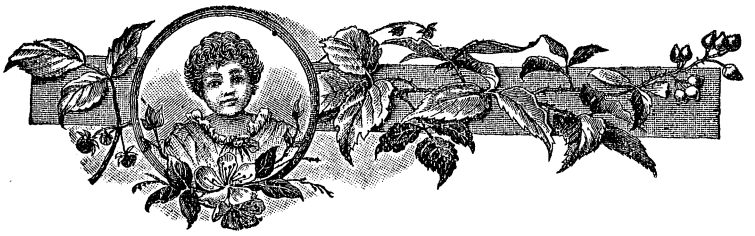
* Durga and a portion of the Himalayas about Kasmere.
† A portion of the Himalayas.
‡ Siva.

into cheerfulness. Her lips wreathed in the feeblest, but sweetest, of smiles. But what a smile it was! It convinced Sitaram, that the crucial moment was not far off.

Sitaram had seated himself on the bedstead. There Rama's son approached him. Again the eyes of Rama became dimmed with tears. For a while, the tears rolled down her emaciated and sunken cheeks without restraint. The infant, on seeing its mother weep, began to cry. In a subdued voice, accompanied with the beckon of the eyes, Rama addressed Sitaram and said :—" Do, for Heaven's sake, raise the boy into your arms for a few moments." Not being able to avoid it, Sitaram did as desired. Thereupon, gasping with feelings of tense agony, and in a tone scarcely audible, Rama said :—" Do not—Oh! do not, I beseech you—abandon the child for the misdeeds of its parent. This is my last prayer. I thought of entrusting it to the care of the elder queen. But, on second thought, I pass it on to your keeping. Will you grant my prayer ? "

Sitaram nodded a mechanical assent. Rama then beckoned him to approach nearer still. On his dong so, Rama touched his feet with her hands, and taking the dust, she conveyed it to her head. Then she rejoined :—" Farewell, farewell for ever. Bless me, that in the next world, I may again get you for my husband."

Rama ceased to speak. The respiration became harder. The eyes lost their natural lustre, The dark shade upon the countenance became darker still. Then everything became obscure. All troubles came to an end—Rama became a lifelese corpse.



CHAPTER XIII

On the day, on which Rama died, Sitaram did, not seek *Chitta-visram*;—things had not gone to that extreme. Before he took the rod, before he met Sree again, Sitaram had loved Rama very dearly. He had loved her better than he had loved Nanda. But the passion had vanished as completely. Sitaram had never paused to ascertain the reason. To-day he reflected for a while. He saw, that he himself, rather than Rama, was to blame. As a matter of fact, in the secret depths of his own heart, he became displeased with himself.

He was, therefore, in a mood not at all enviable. He felt little inclination for the society of Sree. For Sree was very closely allied to this self-reproach. Sree alone was the cause for his own unkind treatment towards Rama. Her company, therefore, would have enlarged the volume of the flame. Accordingly, instead of seeking the company of Sree, the king now sought that of Nanda. Nanda, however, made a mistake. She had already been greatly annoyed. That the king neglected herself, whether in favour of a witch, or some other vicious woman, she never suffered the fact to embitter her own soul against the king. Now, however, that Rama had died, and Nanda felt sure, that the utter neglect on the part of the king had sent her to a premature grave, she could no longer control her temper. For her own feelings of being equally slighted, now growing upon her, simply added fuel to the fire. As a matter of fact, so great became the resentment, that, despite her best endeavours, Nanda could not effectually suppress her feelings.

Conversation now turning to Rama's death, Nanda said :—" You, my liege ! are the cause of her death !"

Thus far only did Nanda manifest her embittered feelings and no further. But this alone proved sufficient to enkindle the flame ; for the fuel were ready. In consequence of the spirit of self-reproach, Sitaram was in the most unenviable of humours. In the secret depths of his soul, he was striving hard at self-exculpation. But this just and well-merited reproach from Nanda pierced him like a barbed arrow. " You, my liege ! are the cause of Rama's death," no sooner had the words fallen upon his ears, than the king thundered forth :—" Quite so ! I'm the cause of the death of you all ! Because I have ensured for you your queenly rank, by inundating he earth with gore split from my bosom, and at the risk of my own life, that you now turn round upon, and denounce, me as the cause of your death. But, why, the lips of you all were sealed, when Rama caused my life to be attempted, by getting Gangaram conducted into her bed-chamber !"

With these words, the king flew into a passion and, withdrawing from Nanda's presence, he repaired to the outer apartment of the mansion. Here the worshipful Chandrachoorh, imaginining, that the king had really felt the keenness of the bereavement, consequent on the demise of Rama, began to talk on a multiplicity of topics, in order to console him. The king's brain was seething, like oil on fire. He did not vouchsafe any reply to the addresses of his preceptor. The holy gentleman fancied, that the monarch had grown penitent on account of Rama's death. And if human endeavours, could divert the king's mind from the witch, such endeavours at the moment were certainly worth the while. As a prelude, therefore, the reverend Chandrachoorh remarked :—"Had you been a little more attentive, my sovereign ! to the younger queen, she might have recovered."

The remark served as a fan to the already kindled fire, and it blazed roaringly up. The king replied :—"Do you, too, think, Sir ! that I am the cause of the younger queen's death ?"

Such, in fact, was Chandrachoorh's conviction. In his own mind, he thought :—"It must needs be said to the king point-blank. Unless one's short-comings are brought home to one's mind's eye, one

can never rectify one's self. I'm his spritual guide as well as his minister. If *I* were to lack in courage to point out his failings, who, on earth, should possess it ?" Chandrachoorh, therefore, responded :—"Methinks 'tis not very wide of the mark."

The king : -Not very wide of the mark —eh ? You are welcome to your own view of the matter. Only have the goodness to remember, that had I longed for anybody's death, not a soul could have trusted his own life into this dominion.

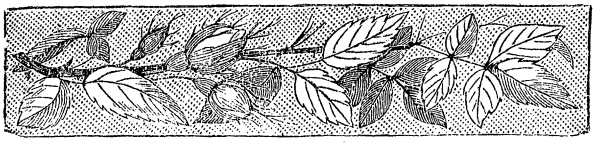
Chandra :—I do not precisely say, that you desire any one's death. But your inattention and neglect cannot ultimately fail to result in the death of one, left absolutely to your protection, even when the death of such a person may be far—far from your mind. Wherefore allude to the younger queen alone? I fear me, the kingdom is tottering to decay for your neglect. For days together, I have been looking for an opportunity to speak to you about it. But, for want of your time, I haven't succeeded in doing so.

The king thought within himself :—"Every one of the fellows complain of inattention. What do the fellows do themselvs ?" He then said :—" Well 'tis the want of care, that you complain of—dont you ? What do you yourselves do ?"

Chandra :—We, certainly do all, that lie in our power. But then, we are, none of us, the king. Whatever, therefore, can't be achieved without the royal mandate, we cannot, for the life of us, do. My prayer is, that next morning you appear in the *darbar*, so that I may acquaint you with every detail, show you the papers, and your royal mandate may go forth.

In his own heart, the king thought :—" You are taking too much advantage of your preceptorship. I, too, should like to teach you a lesson." He then declared :—" Well, I'll consider."

At Chandrachoorh's reproach, the king imagined, that his whole frame was on fire. But the consideration, that the gentleman was his spiritual guide, did not allow the king to vent his pent up fury. It, however, deprived him of his repose that night. The whole of the night, the king spent in devising measures for teaching Chandrachoorh a lesson. Leaving his couch very early, the king attended to his morning duties and, then, appeared in the *darbar*. Chandrachoorh brought in heaps and heaps of papers.



CHAPTER XIV

The matter, which Chandrachoorh had desired to lay before the king, was this. However great the sovereign, and however extensive the monarchy, without money, no goverment can go on. In our own time, we see, that as families, like yours and my own, cannot do without money, so this vast British Empire cannot go on without the "siniews of war." In the same manner, the want of money proved subversive of the powerful Roman Empire and, consequently, to be the cause of the disappearance of ancient civilization. All unawares, Sitaram's government felt the shortness of funds.

Sitaram should not have suffered from monetary famine. His income had increased by leaps and bounds. So much of Bhusana, as had been under the jurisdiction of the Fauzdar, had come into his possession. Twelve landlords in addition were now owing allegiance to him. He was, consequently vested with the authority to collect the revenue, payable by these landed proprietors to the Imperial treasury at Delhi. Not a farthing of that revenue had he, up till that moment, remitted to Moorsidabad. Whatever he was collecting he was enjoying himself. Wherefore, then, this emptiness of the royal coffers?

Popular wants are generally found to go hand in hand with the increase in their income. And this is because of the responsive increase in the expenditure. The subjugation of Bhusana had cost money. Expenses had alike been incurred in the subjection of the twelve land-owners. Moreover, expenses were still being incurred in the re-enforcement and the maintenance of an army, in as much as apprehension was entertained of the standard of rebellion being raised from one quarter, or an army invading the territory from another. The king's coronation had also cost money. Therefore, all things considered, the disbursements might reasonably be supposed to be sufficient to absorb the assets.

But the absorption of assets by disbursements alone does not result in wants. Robbery is its chief cause. At present the king did not supervise any of the branches of the administration; he had taken his abode exclusively in *Chittavisram.* As a matter of fact, a practice had obtained amongst the officers to apply public money to their own private ends, and there was none to suppress the practice. The reverend Chandrachoorh endeavoured to stop it; but his order was unavailing. He detected the theft of some of the higher officials, and thought of laying the books before the king, the next day he appeared in the *darbar.* But the king would, by no means, be caught. "Do attend to business yourself" he would say, and the next instant he would be off to *Chittavisram.* Thus disappointed, Chandrachoorh gave his signature to a few warrants of dismissal and proclaimed them. But the culprits laughed at him. "Holy gentleman," they retorted, "when we need an injunction of the *Smriti**, we'll respect your interpretation of it. Have the goodness to show us the order, bearing the king's hand and seal. Or else go home and attend to your daily duities-at-religion."

To procure the king's sign-manual to a document, however, was not at all difficult. Now-a-days, no sooner was a paper placed before the king than he fixed his signature to it. He could not spare time to acquaint himself with its contents, because he had to go to *Chittavisram.* Chandrachoorh got the royal name to the order for the dismissal of these delinquents. The king signed it without reading it.

It was, however far from bringing about the desired end. The foremost offender, the *Khajanchi*†, was present in the court. He saw, that the king affixed his name to the paper, without going through the contents. When the king was gone he said:—"I defy you;—that is your own order, and not the king's. He did not read the contents of the document. When the sovereign dismisses us on a careful personal investigation into our cases, then, and not till then, will we make room for others." Nobody, therefore,

* The Hindoo law.
† The treasurer.

left his place. As a matter of course, theft ran riot and the treasury being in their charge, Chandrachoorh was quite crippled in its prevention.

It was therefore, that Chandrachoorh had become so very importunate in his demands for the royal presence in the *darbar*. Chadrachoorh now explained the things in the presence of the criminals themselves The king had already been universally provoked, and this excess of robbery flung him into such a pitch of fury as deprived him of his equanimity. He, therefore, declared the sentence that the offenders should be impaled.

The entire court suddered at the sentence. Chandrachoorh imagined as if he had been struck with the lightning. He said :—"You know not what you say, my liege ! Such a horrible penalty for so trivial an offence !"

Impatient with rage, the sovereign replied :—"What do you mean by the term 'trivial offence?' For a thief, the most condign punishment is to be impaled."

Chandra :—But there are Brahmans among them. How dare you perpetrate the slaughter of Brahmans ?

The king :—Let the nose and the ears of the Brahmans be cut off ; and then the word "thief" being seared with red hot iron on their forehead, let them be suffered to depart. The rest must be impaled.

Having proclaimed this mandate, the king repaired to *Chittavisram*. Each criminal was punished according to the precise term of the sentence passed on them. There arose an universal cry of oh and alas in the town. Several of the officers of State left their situation and forsook the locality.

CHAPTER XV

Robbery was thus prevented, yet wants were far from being removed. The affairs of government demanded, that the king should be made acquainted with its precise condition. But the king could not be approached. Or if approached, he would listen to nothing. After a few days of ineffectual attempts, Chandrachoorh, at length, got hold of the monarch one day. He said :—"Potentate ! unless you pay very particular heed to these representations, your diadem will not be worth a moment's purchase."

The king !—I'm quite indifferent—no, I am all attention. Proceed with what has happened.

Chandra :—The soldiers are leaving in companies.

The king :—Wherefore ?

Chandra :—Their wages are not paid.

The king :—And pray, why not paid !

Chandra :—The coffers are all empty.

"Do defalcations continue even at this moment."

Chandra :—Far from it. Peculations have certainly been stopped but what of that? The thieves have not disgorged what they swallowed.

The king :—Are there no fresh collections and realizations ?

Chandra :—Not a blessed pice.

The king :—And the reason ?

Chandra :—Is that those, charged with collections and realizations, say :—'We can ill afford to be impaled for deficiency in the funds, should any be found out in the long run.'

The king :—Dispense with then services.

Chandra :—Where are new hands to be found ? And all new hands can never be trusted with collections and realizations.

The king :—In that case imprison them.

Chandra :—Heavens ! Do you think any body will then come forward and step easy into the place of *tehsildars* ? *

The king :—Whoever fails to realize the arrears to a pice, shall be thrown into the dungeon.

Chandra :—But not the *tehsildars* alone are to blame. Most of the subjects do not pay.

The king :—What the devil do they not pay for ?

Chandra :—They say,—' Well pay when the Mahamedans have taken possession of the territory. Shall we pay over again by paying at present ?'

The king :—He also shall be incarcerated, who does not pay, or who becomes a defaulter.

Chandrachoorh was bewildered. He said :—" The prison is not spacious enough, my sovereign !

The king :—Let big sheds be erected.

Thus speaking, the king signed the warrants for the imprisonment alike of defaulters and *tehsildars* and bent his way to *Chittavisram*. Chandrachoorh registered a vow in heaven no more to acquaint the monarch with affairs, connected with the administration of the dominion.

This order brought the liveliest sufferings into the country. All the prisons were overstocked with captives. Even the erection of new sheds by Chandrachoorh did not furnish the demanded accommodation. The *tehsildars* and the defaulters took to flight, and in their train took those also, that had never defaulted.

'Twas therefore, that we suggested, that the flame had already been enkindled, it now caught the dwelling. We know not, if Sitaram would have thus fallen from his lofty pedestal, if Sree had not come. Because, in the heart of his hearts, Sitaram had determined to forget Sree, by devoting his mind to the various branches of the administration. This fact we have already mentioned in the proper place. But untunchy Sree appeared and the resolution was carried away in a moment of revived affection as a sandy embankment is washed away by a flood tide. We may not have said, that

* Rent collectors.

devotion to administrative duties alone would have proved a panacea. But since Sree had returned to Sitaram, if she had preferred dwelling in the palace like Nanda, and, like her, had succoured the king in the discharge of his regal duties, in that case, his fall, which was brought about by a sense of vanity, produced by the possession of rank and wealth, might have been well averted. Because the vanity, which originated the degradation, might, also, have been weighed down by the help both of Nanda and Sree. Then again, since Sree had elected to tenant *Chittavisram* as the king's mistress, in preference to living in the mansion as his consort, if she had only discharged all the functions of the position of her choice, instead of attending to her ascetism, in that event also, the situation would, by no means, have become as perilous as it had become. The king's desires being once gratified, she would have stood, in his eyes, shorn of fascinations to a certain extent. After a few days, the king's eyes might have been opened to the perils that environed him. Again, since Sree had chosen to live as an ascetic, if she only acted as a common one, in that case also, the position might not have become so very dangerous. But a woman of ascetism, resembling Indrani* herself in the glory of her charms, would shower down nectar from her lips from her seat on a tiger's skin, and, occupying a seat at a distance, Sitaram should gaze at her countenance like a dog. And this in spite of the bond, that subsisted between them—the bond of matrimony! For five livelong years had Sitaram laid down his life, as it were, for her. Was there ever a misery livelier than this? It was this, that effected Sitaram's ruin. The fire had only caught the house; now it began to consume it. And pushed beyond the sphere of patience, Sitaram resolved upon the exercise of force, in order to make himself the possessor of Sree's charms.

But, then, the mind, even of the most heartless voluptuary recoils from the bare idea of applying force to a woman, whom he loves. True, that the sentiment of love, with which Sree had inspired the king, now turned into sensuality. But the genuine tenderness had not altogether been crushed out. That's why, Sitaram could not bring himself to carry out the contemplated outrage, however inly bent he might be. To take recourse to force or not—the

decision of this question—had cost Sitaram many a mortal pang. So long as he could not have arrived at a satisfactory solution, Sitaram had passed his days like one deprived of the power of reasoning. It was in this morbid state of the mind, that the king had caused the public officers to be impaled, *tehsildars* to be thrown into the dungeon, defaulters to be enchained, subjects to take to flight, and the kingdom to be split up.

At length Sitaram arrived at the decision, that the application of force was the only means to make himself the possessor of Sree's person. But directly the resolve was taken, and before 'twas carried into execution, certain cause for fresh annoyance cropped up. The reverend Chandrachoorh approached the king one day, and said :—" I've purposed going upon a pilgrimage, my liege! Your permission, and I am off."

The words fell like a sledge-hammer upon the king's brain. Chandrachoorh's withdrawal from the administration left but two courses :—To forsake Sree, or to forsake the diadem. The king, therefore, laid himself out to dissuading the holy gentleman from the contemplated pilgrimage.

Chandrachoorh was firmly resolved no longer to inhabit the kingdom, nor to take part in the vicious ruler's affairs. He, therefore, did not easily yield. A prolonged 'scene' was enacted. Chandrachoorh reproached the king bitterly, and the king gave good many remonstrative replies. At last Chandrachoorh consented to remain. But it was not before a late hour in the night, that the 'scene' terminated. The king, as a matter of course, did not go to *Chittavisram*. Something, however, of uncommon interest took place in the villa.

CHAPTER XVI

As accident directed it, that night a Bhairabi appeared at the gate of *Chittavisram*. Though a pleasure retreat, *Chittavisram* was the residence of royalty. A few porters were lounging in the vestibule. The Bhairabi came and begged access of them.

The porters replied :—"'Tis a palace. A queen resides here. Access is permitted to nobody."

It is needless to say, that even the mistresses of royalty, the domestics hail as queens.

The Bhairabi said:—"That is known to me. The king also knows me. To me access is not forbidden. You, people, go and announce me to the king."

The up-country men returned :—"The king is not here now—gone to the mansion."

The Bhairabi :—Then you inform the queen, who resides here. Will not her permission do?

The gate-keepers wore the appearance of indecision. That into the inner apartment of *Chittavisram* nobody should penetrate was the particular order of the king. The queen, also, interdicted such intrusions. Once, during the king's absence, two of Nanda's emissaries sought admittance into the inner apartment. But the queen, being made acquainted with the demand, denied them access. Was there any further necessity for informing the queen? But from her features, this Bhairbi did not appear to be a mortal. If *her* dismissal should result in troubles?

And after a good deal of shilli-shallying, the porters sent the news through a servant-girl. On hearing of the arrival of a Bhairabi, Sree instantly permitted her to be shown in. Yayanti was ushered into the seraglio.

On her making her appearance, Sree said :—"Your presence is highly welcome. I've arrived at a crisis, wherein nought but your counsel can do."

Yayanti observed :—"Of a surety, I told you I would come at this time to enquire into your affairs! They say in the town, that the government has fallen into the greatest possible disorder, and the finger of certainty is pointed to you as the cause. On my way hither I have heard pupils in *Tols** reciting *slokas*† of XIX canto of Raghu.‡ Now, then, what, on earth, is the matter?"

Sree said :—That's why I have been looking for you." And Sree mentioned the particulars from beginning to end. Yayanti asked :—"Then why not perform your duty?"

Sree :—Certainly I do not understand what it is.

Yayanti :—Hie you to the palace. There dwell as the king's mate, and, as his prime minister, hold him fast to his duties. 'Tis a part, legitimately belonging to you, and to you alone.

Sree :—That I verily know not. As sure as anything, I have never learned the duties of a queen. Those of renunciation, you've taught me, and I've learned them. I am sure to make a mess of everything by undertaking what I neither know, nor can perform. What earthly good may be derived from a woman of ascetic austerities being converted into a king's bride?"

Yayanti reflected. She then said :—"That I can't say. It seems, that the duty cannot be performed by you. Had that been possible, would things have come to this?"

Sree :—Perhaps a day there was, when, by the shaking of the extremity of my winding-sheet, I destroyed the Mahamedan army. Had it been that day, I might have succeeded. But Fate would not choose that track. Such instructions were neglected. Fate adopted a diametrically opposite course—the hermitage—the asceticism. Who knows, if it is to take another turn."

Yayanti :—But what is the duty at present?

---

* Educational institutions, kept by private individuals of the priestly caste, where pupils live altogether with their preceptors, and take their lessons in various subjects, as literature, philosophy, &c.

† Poetical stanzas.

‡ Raghubansa by Kalidas.

Sree :—None save flight. It is not altogether for the king, or the kingdom, but for my own sake, that I pitch upon such a course. Left constantly in the presence of the king, the idea reverts to my mind, that I am his lawfully wedded wife.

Yayanti :—Assuredly you are.

Sree :—That sets past events trooping back into the memory. Shall I again be enmeshed in the toils of affection? That's why I said beforehand, that it was better not to have met the king. Of enemies, there are twelve, including the king.

Yayanti :—And the other eleven are in your own person? You've certainly trained yourself to self-abnegation after your own fashion! I see you've wrested back what you passed into the keeping of the Father of the universe, and have learned to think of yourself into the bargain. Is this your renunciation?

Sree :—Hence I ask if flight is not advisable.

Yayanti :—Advisable, by all means.

Sree —The king says, he will commit suicide, if I leave him.

Yayanti :—Women-beguiling sentiments of the sterner sex—the delirium of men, wounded with the floral dart!

Sree :—Then, there is, in reality, no such apprehension?

Yayanti :—What to you, even if there were? What is the life or death of the king to you? Is it because he is your husband, that you are so sentimental? Is this your renunciation?

Sree :—It may or it may not be. But in what respect may the death of king prove productive of universal good?

Yayanti :—The king shall not die. You need not be uneasy on that score. An infant, when it loses its toys, only cries, but dies not. You do that, whereby, by resigning the benefits of your actions, you may render yourself the possessor of a mind of subdued appetites.

Sree :—In that case immediate departure must be had recourse to.

Yayanti :—This moment.

Sree :—But how am I to emerge from this place? Why should the guards allow me to depart?

Yayanti :—But here are your *gairic*, *rudraksha* and trident of other days. Adopt the gear of a Bhairabi, and tramp off; the guards will not oppose you.

Sree :—They will mistake me for you. But, then, how are you to effect your egress?

Yayanti smiled and replied :—"What a good luck is it for me! After the lapse of such a long time, there has appeared one, at least, who is solicitous on my behalf. What harm even if I fail to effect my exit, sister?"

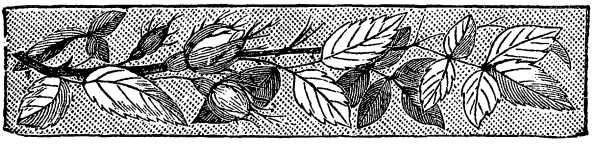
Sree :—You'll fall into the clutches of the king. I know not, but that he'll be embittered against you.

Yayanti :—But what can he do to me? Is the king possessed of powers to work an injury to a *sannyasini*?

Sree had unbounded confidence in Yayanti. Without, therefore, bandying any more words, she asked :—"Where shall I meet you?"

You go to—village. There procure an interview with the Rajah's priest. Give me your trident and take my own. The priest of the Rajah, alluded to is my preceptive pupil. This branded trident of mine in your hand, and he shall blindly do your biddings. You shall ask him to keep you very close. For there will be a precious deal of races and chases after you. I'm pretty sure, he will conceal you somewhere in the Rajah's dwelling. There will I meet you.

Sree, thereupon, took the dust of Yayanti's feet, and sallied forth to seek the wilderness again. The gate-keepers did not resist her.



CHAPTER XVII

Ramchand :—By heavens ! things have become quite horrible to contemplate. People have lost all endurance !

Shamchand :—Assuredly, my dear brother ! Not a moment more to be lost in this dominion.

Ram :—But you've been thinking of removing for such a long time past. Why have you not given yourself the move ?

Sham :—Well, I am about as good as gone. The women and the children, I have already sent over to Naldanga. As regards myself, I have got some outstanding bills to collect. So I thought, I might as well stay here yet awhile, in order to be able to get in as much as possible. But from whom to collect them ? The debtors, too, as a class, have become fugitives.

Ram :—Well, what's this fresh occurence ? Know you what's this turmoil about ? I have heard that the prisons cannot furnish rooms to the captives, no—not the newly erected sheds, either. And now I'm further informed, that the cow-sheds are cleared of their bovine inmates, and their places, made over to the imprisoned.

Sham :—Don't you know the occurance ? The witch has fled !

Ram :—That I've heard. Well, the witch did not depart, when so many sacrificial rites were resorted to with a view to secure her removal. But wherefore has she made herself scarce of her own accord, now ?

Sham :—"Of her own accord, indeed ! (Then aside). The mention of the circumstance makes my hair stand on end. They say, persecuted by certain deity, she has now taken to her heels.

Ram :—Can I believe you ?

Sham :—Haven't you heard, that a certain goddess graces this town with her presence ? Now and then, she appears in public.

A large number of people have encountered her. Why, were you not present at the trial of the younger queen?

Ram :—Yes, yes. Is it she? But can you tell me who she is?

Sham :—Has she ever condescended to give her own history to anybody? Different people give different versions.

Ram :—And, pray, what are they?

Sham :—Some say, she is the tutelary goddess of this town. Others state, she has been seen emerging from the shrine of Luckshminarayanji, in her wonted features, while a third set of people aver, that she is Dashabhuja* herself. They have seen her vanish on getting into the temple of Dashabhuja.

Ram :—That is possible. Or else wherefore should she have adopted the gear of a Bhairabi? Did she not grace the court, you alluded to just now, in the raiment of a Bhairabi?

Sham :—Well, well, whoever she may be, 'twas our good luck, that we could encounter her that day. But the king's mind has been so perverted—

Ram :—Yes, but let me first hear out how the witch has been got rid of.

Sham :—Seeing, that the witch was the cause of lots of political evils the goddess assumed the shape of a Bhairabi one day, and appeared before her to kill her.

Ram :—Horror of horrors! What then!

Sham :—What else could it be? Perceiving, that mother had worn her martial appearance, that loathsome thing of a witch drew herself up to the height of a palm tree and, assuming the most hideous appearence, made herself invisible, amidst her own roars and bellows, nobody knew whither.

Ram :—Well, who's told you so?

Sham :—Who else should have told me? The eye-witnesses have said so. The king is so spell-bound towards the witch, that, on her departure, he has thrown into the prison all the wardars and a lot of other domestices, both male and female, attached to the staff at *Chittavisram*. It is they, who have disclosed all these facts. They say :—'In what respect, Great King! are we to blame? Of

* The Goddess Durga, who has ten arms.

what practical avail may our power be, in opposition to the divine one?'

Ram :—You are sure 'tis not hearsay?

Sham :—Can it ever be so?

Ram :—Well, who knows, but, that with a view to eat of carcasses, as was her wont, the witch had gone out at night, and had not come back; and the domestics, in order to shield themselves from the wrath of the king, who must have demanded an explanation, have given a coloured version.

Sham :—But does it look like an invention after all? They have seen, that each of her teeth resembles a radish, and her hair, the flax. Her eyes are as large as wooden trays; her tongue is of the whole length of an aligator; each of her breasts bears a real resemblance to an earthen jar; and breathing, to the roll of the thunder; while her voice rends the earth itself.

Ram :—Horror! the story is, indeed, awe-inspiring. But what were you about to speak of the perversion of the king's mind?

Sham :—I'm coming to it, listen. So much of the unmerited imprisonment of innocence. Then, to hunt after, and bring back, that pitiful witch, the king has been despatching no end of emissaries to the various parts of the country. Now, however, that she has reverted to her proper sphere, who, amongst the mortals, has skill sufficient for the purpose? None can do it. Everybody is returning and, in folded hands, is reporting, that her whereabouts can't be ascertained.

Ram :—And what does the monarch say to that?

Sham :—No sooner a man comes back and reports, that he has failed in his endeavours, than the king sends him into the prison. In this way, the houses of correction have been overstocked. On the other hand, the officers of State have become so much panic-stricken that, leaving their houses and dwellings, wives and children, they are making themselves scarce. And naturally enough, their example is followed by the subjects as well as the shop-keepers of the town.

Ram :—But what does the goddess do? A single glance of her divine eyes may save the innocent folk!

Sham :—She is Bhagabati* in person. Having observed these

* The Goddess Durga, who is possessed of six wealths.

things, she, one day, transmogrified herself into a Bhairabi and, appearing before the king, she said :—"Prince ! oppress not the innocent. Persecution of innocence entails loss of monarchy. These people are not at all to blame. It is I, who have driven out that vile witch, because she proved the cause of endless evils to the kingdom. If you regard this as an offence, surely enough, I have been the offender, and if anybody is really to be punished, let these fellows depart, and let such punishment be dealt on me.

Ram :—What, then ?

Sham :—That's why I was speaking of the perversion of the king's mind. Since the disappearance of that pitiful thing, the king has worn such a fierce mien, that not a crow even dares approach him. The worshipful Tarkalankar ventured to seek him, as also the elder queen. But downright abuses lent wings to their legs.

Ram :—What do you tell me ? Abuses to the spiritual guide ! There, certainly, shall be none to bear his name.

Sham :—Is there any second opinion on the point ? But hear what came next. In the first stage of that fierceness, who, do you think, did appear ? It was that deity. Well, then, she appeared and spoke as I have already told you. No sooner she had finished than the king's eyes became blood-shot, and he raised his arms to strike her. But, instead of doing so, he has done what is more dreadful still.

Ram :—And what has he done ?

Sham :—He has thrown the goddess into the dungeon, and has passed the order, that in the event of the witch not being brought back within three days, the goddess shall be stripped naked in the presence of all the inhabitants of the town, and lashed by a *Chandal**.

Rama :—Ho ! ho ! hoho ! What can he do to a deity ? Has the king been demented ?—But has the goddess entered the prison ? No power, to which fresh is heir, can hold her in a dungeon.

Sham :—Well, who ever has divined the character of a deity

* One, belonging to a menial caste, whose contact amounts to pollution.

aright? The monarch's days of enjoying the diadem are up. That's why the goddess is seeking to go back to her own place on the commonest plea imaginable. As soon as the royal mandate went forth, the Divine Mother, quite unconcerned, and with paces, resembling those of the king of elephants, walked into the prison. I'm told, every night there arises a great hue and cry within the palace walls. All the gods combined chant hymns, while the sages read the Vedas as well as other incantations. The sounds traverse the prison walls and reach the ears of the guards on duty outside. But directly they open the gate, everything disappears. (We need hardly mention, that Yayanti herself read the hymns, which smote the ears of the warders outside).

Ram :—What comes next?

Sham :—Now this day makes up the three days alluded to. The king has caused the proclamation to be given, that to-morrow the modesty of a hag, accused of robbery, shall be outraged, and she shall be whipped. Anybody, wishing to witness it, may come. Has it not reached your ears?

Ram :—Insensate monarch! Wherefore not the holy Tarkalankar raises his voice against it, and why not the elder queen, either? The fear of a few abuses so effectually holds them back from approaching the king!

Sham :—They are reported to have reasoned a good deal. The king protested and said :—"If she be a deity in fact, her own defence she will effect. What's is the use of your intercession? If, on the other hand, she be a mortal, in that case, as the king, I am entitled to punish a thief, and your interference is equally useless.

Ram :—To a certain extent the king has not spoken wrong. In fact he has struck the right chord. However, what comes off to-morrow is certainly worth the trouble of a journey to be present at the scene. Will you go?

Sham :—Can it be otherwise? One and all shall go. Such an unique occurrence! Who should not go to witness it.

CHAPTER XVIII

Yayanti should be whipped to-day. Proclamation had already been given in the territory, that she should be stripped naked and lashed. No sooner had the day dawned, than people began to arrive, so that at an early hour, the castle became filled with spectators, and there was left no more room. People began to press against each other; then they were densely packed, and jammed by one another, till, at length, they became merged into an aggregate of a mass of life. On another occasion, there had collected a similar multitude in the castle. That had been on the occasion of Rama's trial; to-day it was the punishment of Yayanti. The punishment attracted a larger crowd than the trial. From the open casement Nanda saw the spectacle. It appeared to be an ocean of human faces, in which nothing save beards of black hair, bearing resemblance to waves in the ocean, was descernible. Only here and there the veiled head of a solitary woman, or else the head of a man, having a white sheet tied round it, seemed like foams on the surface of the dark water. And the trial of Rama rushed back into her memory. She remembered, that, on that occasion, the ocean of human faces had appeared to be highly agitated—greatly disturbed—as if lashed by a violent blast. It had cost the public officers a good deal of trouble to restore peace and order. But to-day, a dead silence reigned in the castle. The indomitable influence of some undefined political evil, exercising its spell over the minds of the spectators, effectively sealed their lips. An unknown fear spread its influence over every heart. In short, to-day the castle, peopled, though it was, with thousands and thousands of spectators, appeared more dreadful than a vast wilderness, hacked and torn by brutes, belonging to the leonine and tigerine races.

In the middle of that spacious courtyard, a raised platform was erected. On that attitude, and with a long whip in hand, stood a stout and hideous looking *Chandal* as the type and personification of darkness itself. That Yayanti should be conducted there, and stripped to the skin before the eyes of everybody present, she should be lashed was the royal mandate.

Yayanti was not yet brought there, nor had the king made his appearance. She should be escorted into the *darbar* after the king had entered it. Opposite the platform, a seat was kept for the royal accommodation. Around the seat stood soldiers as well as the body-guards. But none of the public officers were present. Their souls recoiled from the bare idea of being present at a disgustingly abhorent scene like that. The king, also, had not called upon any of them to be present.

In expectation of the king's presence, in expectation of the advent of the accused deity or woman, whoever she might be, in expectation, alike, of seeing what was to be enacted, the whole crowd stood on the tenter-hooks of suspense. Just at this moment, the herald cried out, and the panegyrists trumpeted forth an eulogistic song. The spectators became aware, that the king was coming in.

To-day the royal toilette was utterly neglected. Like dark and menacing clouds on an April sky towards of the close of the day, the king's mien was just terrible to contemplate. His large eyes were blood-shot—his ample chest very now and then heaved and dilated. Like the lowering of clouds about to pour down a shower, the king came in and occupied the throne. Nobody greeted the royal advent even by murmuring the words, "victory to the king of kings !"

That immense multitude stood on tiptoe and cast their eyes around. They saw, that the guards were leading Yayanti on to the top of the platform. The guards placed her there, and withdrew. Like the glory of a full moon, appearing on the top of an edifice, Yayanti's peerless charms appeared upon the altitude. The thousands and thousands of spectators, with countenances upturned and eyes cast above, surveyed the figure, which thus appeared upon the platform, and which was clad with a *gairic* and surrounded with a lustre. The elevated, fully developed, flowingly delicious, and at

the same time brightly luminous form—its celestial calmness, preter-angelic tranquility—everybody was absorbed in admiration to behold ! They saw, that Yayanti's countenance was amazingly cheerful, like a lotus opening its bud at the rays of the sun just appearing. A subdued, sweet, cool and mild smile was yet playing upon her lips—that cool, sweet and mild smile, that betokened the power of surmounting every peril. A greater portion of the crowd, thereupon, took her for a deity and, in folded hands, made their obeisance to her. When some people saw, that others bowed to Yayanti, a kindred spirit of devotion inspired them, and they shouted forth acclamations like "victory to mother!" "victory to mother Luckshmi"! and so forth. Those acclamations were echoed and re-echoed from one portion of the courtyard to the other—from one end to another—like a thunder-clap in a mountain range. At length the assembled multitude, in one voice, indulged in a loud and prolonged cheer. The castelated mansion seemed to shake in its foundatian, and the whip dropped from the *Chandal's* grasp. In her own mind was Yayanti invoking :—"Great God ! victory is the portion of thee alone ! This congregation is but a manifestation of thyself ! Thou art, from thine place in the throat of this multitude, bursting forth into acclamations in praise of thy own self. Victory to thee, O Lord of the universe ! victory to thee alone ! Who am I ?"

The incensed monarch now assumed a fiery mien and thundered forth :—"Snatch the clothes and deal the whip !"

At this moment the holy Chandrachoorh hastily approached the king and, catching hold of both of his wrists, he said :—"Great Prince ! in mercy spare her ! I will ask for no more boon. Grant me this last one—let her off."

The king :—(In a tone of railery) Why ? Is not the 'deity' possessed of the power to extricate herself ? This is the punishment, the vile impostress deserves.

Chandra :—She may not be a deity, but certainly she is one of the weaker sex.

The king :—Women even, the king may subject to penalty.

Chandra :—Do you hear these acclamations ? They only drown your name.

The king :—Holy Father ! go about your own business. Have you done with all your maunscripts and the like ?

Chandrachoorh withdrew. At the royal behest, the *Chandal* again picked up the whip, flourished it at, and surveyed the features of, Yayanti. Then lowering the ratan, he gazed at the king. From the countenance of royalty, the *Chandal* transferred his regards to the features of Yayanti, and, at last, flinging down the whip with all his might, he stood still.

"It comes to this—does it ?" growled the king. The *Chandal* said :—" August Sovereign ! it can't be expected from me !"

The king said :—" Mind, you shall be impaled !"

With united palms of his hands, the *Chandal* answered :—" If such be the royal decree, I'll endure that ; but this task, I can't perform !"

The king, thereupon, ordered the domestics to seize the *Chandal* and throw him into the prison.

Having perceived, that the guards were about to mount the platform to take the individual into custody, Yayanti, now, addressed Sitaram and said :—" Oppress not this man. Your order, I'm carrying out myself. *Chandal* or an executioner is not needed."

But seeing, that the guards were still advancing to capture the man, Yayanti now said to him :—" Minion ! wherefore draw down upon yourself corporal pain for my sake ? I am a woman of ascetic rigidities. I am beyond the influence of pleasure and pain. What can a whip do to me ? As for the nudity, to one, situated as I am, apparel or nudity is all the same. Wherefore risk pain ? Better pick up the lash !"

The *Chandal*, however, did not pick up the whip. Yayanti, then, said :—" You do not place any reliance on my assurance, my child ! because I am a woman. But behold the proof."

And Yayanti picked up the ratan and held it in a firm grip in her right hand. Then, before that vast assembly, she stretched her little, delicate and diaphaneous palm, having the hue of a full-blown lotus, and, with all her might, she dealt the lash on it. The whip worked its way into the flesh, a quantity of which was found sticking to it when it was withdrawn, and blood came so profusely, that Yayanti's *gairic* winding-sheet as well as the platform were

quite watered with it. The congregated crowd raised the cry of oh and alas.

With a subdued smile, Yayanti, now, addressed the *Chandal* and said :—" Do you see my child ! Does a woman of self abnegation ever feel pain ? What alarms you ? "

The individual addressed turned towards the gory wound, and then fixed his regards upon the enraptured countenance of Yayanti. Then, turning upon his heels, he hastily descended from the altitude, and ran as fast as his legs could carry him. He then concealed himself in the thickest of the crowd, nobody knew where.

To his followers, the king thereupon said :—" *Dosra admi lao—musalman* (fetch another man—a Mohomedan.)"

The servitors ushered a butcher, who appeared to be the very personification of Death itself. He was not permitted to slaughter cows in Mahammadpur ; but in the outskirts, he used to kill goats and rams and sell them. He was very robust, and forbidding in looks. At the royal mandate, he now mounted the platform and, with the whip in hand, he stood before Yayanti. Then brandishing the ratan before her eyes, the butcher aaid :—" *Kapra utar. Teri ghost, hum tukra tukra karke dookanme bechangai* (strip thyself of thy clothes. I'll reduce thee into mincemeat and sell it in my stall.)"

With a countenance, not at all shaded by the clouds of distressing thoughts, Yayanti, now, addressed the assembly and said :—" At the royal behest, I'll strip myself of clothes here—on this platform. He, amongst ye, who happens to be the offspring of an immaculate woman, shall remember his mother and veil his eyes for a few moments. He, who is the parent of a daughter, shall call her into memory, and, imagining me to be the selfsame child, shall, also, close his optics. He, amongst ye, likewise, who is a Hindoo, and is devoted to Gods and to Brahmans alike, shall cover the organs of vision. Those, however, that have got unchaste women for their mothers, or that are born of courtizans, may do exactly as they choose ; before them, I am not abashed ; I do not reckon them as belonging to mankind."

Whether the multitude closed their eyes or not, Yayanti paused not to see. Her mind was attuned to the highest of notes. Except

God, Yayanti was marking nought at the moment. Turning towards the king only, Yayanti said :—At thy order, I will divest myself of my raiment ; but thou must not turn thine eyes to see me. Thou art the sovereign of this territory. If thou dost display any brutal propensity, what should not thy subjects do ? Illustrious Monarch, I inhabit the wilderness ! There, occasions arise for me to be naked, Once I fell a prey to a tiger. However, somehow or other, I could save myself from the brute, but not my clothes. Thee, too, in consideration of thy conduct, I take for one of the wild beasts. I, therefore, feel no shame in thy presence. But thou shouldst feel it, in as much as thou art the ruler of the land, one of the domestic sphere, and possessed of a queen. Close thine eyes."

But these words were utterly lost. With an inordinate degree of wrath, the king was well nigh blinded. Without, therefore, vouchsafing a reply to Yayanti's utterances, he addressed the butcher and said :—"*Kapra chhin leo*" (wrest the clothes.)

Yayanti, now, perceiving the utter inutility of further speech, fell upon her knees on the platform. She had deceived herself, and, perhaps, the tears now started in her eyes. Yayanti had imagained, that since she had given all mundane happiness and misery over to the tides, since she had risen superior to the paltry feelings of pleasure and pain, shame should have ceased to exercise its influence over her. She, moreover, thought, that since in her, there was no alliance between the mind and the senses, in her estimation, clothes, or the want of them were one. Sin itself was shame. For what else should she be ashamed ? The feeling of shame before mortals, subject to pleasure or pain, was a meaningless jargon, unless in the divine presence. Wherefore should she hesitate to stand in a state of nudity before that assembly ? It was therefore, that Yayanti had not considered herself any way distressed. As for the lashing, she had not even thought of it. Now, however, that the moment for her to divest herself of her apparel had come, nobody knew whence that evil of shame came and overwhelmed that woman, who had achieved a complete victory over her senses, and who had risen dominant to the trivial sentiments of earthly weal or woe. It was therefore, that, in undisguised contempt for the feminine life, Yayanti sank upon her knees and, with united palms of her hands,

with a soul purified in the extreme, and a mind brought under perfect control, she now fell to communion, and in her own mind she said :—"O Thou, the Friend of the indigent! spare me to-day. I thought as if I had succeeded in giving all earthly happinss and misery over to the tides ; but, O Thou, the Retrencher of vanity! my tympany has been totally knocked out, and Thou spare me to-day. Wherefore, O Lord! didst Thou invest me with femininity? Mundane pleasures and pains may easily be renounced ; but, on no consideration whatever, can one, invested with femininity, take one's adieu of shame. Therefore do I invoke Thee, O Lord of the universe, Thou protect me to-day!"

So long as Yayanti was thus invoking the aid of the Almighty, the butcher was tugging at the disengaged end in her drapery. The assembled spectators raised an unanimous cry of oh and alas, and said :—"August Prince! ruin is sure to seize thee on account of this sin Thy diadem trembles on the verge of destruction." The king, however, paid no heed to these utterances. Helpless Yayanti was doing her best to recover her wrap's extremity—she never meant to leave it in the butcher's grasp, and tears were raining down her cheeks. Sree, had she been present, would, of a verity, have wondered greatly. Nobody had ever marked rheum in Yayanti's eyes. With the disengaged end of her winding-sheet in her wounded and gory hand, was Yayanti calling out :—"O Lord of the universe! save me."

Perhaps the utterances reached the ears of the Lord of the universe. For, the lamentations of the assembled multitude now suddenly turned into acclamations of "victory to the queen," "victory to the honorable lady!" At this moment the jingling of jewellery fell upon the ears of Yayanti, who had knelt, with her head bent forward. She, now, upraised her countenance and saw, that, attended by the ladies of the royal household, the august queen, Nanda, was mounting the platform. Yayanti rose.

The ladies, now, gathered round Yayanti. Nanda, in standing in front of Yayanti, placed her behind the barrier of her own person. Amidst a roar of claps, the spectators shouted forth the name of Hari. The butcher left Yayanti's hand, but did not leave the altitude.

The king was surprised as well as incensed. In a voice of

concentrated fury, he now addressed Nanda and said :—"What does this intrusion mean, Your Highness ?"

Nanda returned :—"My liege ! I am a wife as well as a mother. So long as there is a spark of vitality in me, I will never suffer you to commit a sin like this. For, in that case, there shall be none, whom I may call my own."

As irate as ever, the king added :—"The inner apartment, and not this one, is your proper place. Hie you to that quarter."

But Nanda gave no reply to the king. She only said :—"Sire ! how dares this loathsome butcher linger on the platform, where I deign to stand ? Order him to dismount !"

The king spoke not. Nanda, then, called out at the top of her voice and said :—"Is there nobody here, in this palatial mansion, who, for my sake, can cause this abhorent object to get down ?"

And thousands and thousands of spectators, with the words "let him die," "let him die," on their lips, rushed menacingly on the butcher. He jumped off the platform and attempted to escape. But the spectators soon overtook him, add led him out of the castle amidst a regular shower of strokes. Then, subjecting him to various other indignities, they let him depart with his life only.

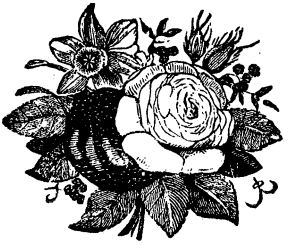
Nanda said to Yayanti :—"Mother ! in mercy give me the assurance of thy forgiveness. I fear me, that some deity has come down to find out pleas. Be pleased not to mind the offence, mother ! Have the goodness to consecrate the seraglio with thy pedal dust—I will adore thy feet !"

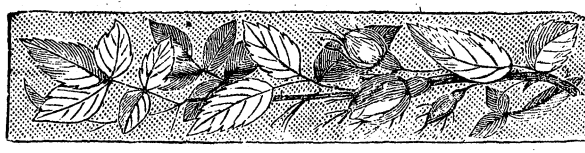
The queen, then, with her retinue, surrounded Yayanti and conducted her into the inner apartment. Not able to counteract it, the king also left the throne. The spectators, thereupon, burst out into a great uproar and, pronouncing benediction upon Nanda, they emerged from the castle.

Yayanti tarried not in the female quarter even for moments. Nanda entreated very much for permission to wash her feet with Gangetic water and to place her upon a throne. But Yayanti ridiculed the idea. She said ;—"My child ! with my heart, and soul, and words do I bless, that good be always thy portion. Do not, for a moment, imagine, that I have, in any way, become sorry or angry. Forbid it Heaven, should danger befall thee at any

time, the moment I am aware of it, I'll come and help thee out of it. But a royal lodge is no fit place for a woman, who has renounced everything earthly. So farewell."

Thereupon, taking the dust of Yayanti's feet, Nanda and the ladies of the palace bade her adieu.





CHAPTER XIX

Incidents of the inner apartment of a royal abode are talked abroad, but never correctly. The facts, that are circulated by women, as a matter of fact, assume a highly exaggerated form on account of frequent transfers from one lip to another. Particularly, where the occurrence savours of a little wonderment, there the exaggeration surpasses all conjecture. The colloquy between the two citizens have already convinced us how far one could rely upon the rumour about Yayanti. Presently, the simple fact, that Yayanti sallied forth from the mansion as soon as she had entered it, got bruited abroad, so as to convince the public, that immediately after her entering the zenana, she vanished miraculously.

As a matter of fact, the public now believed her to be the tutelary goddess as well as the guardian angel of the town; that she had come to find out pleas, whereon to forsake the kingdom, and on getting such excuses, had now withdrawn her protection for ever. The kingdom was, therefore, given up for lost. Unfortunately a rumour got afloat exactly at this moment, that the Nawab's force was marching from Moorsidabad. Thereupon the public grew less sceptical as to the dreaded ruin of the dominion. Consequently the town looked all animation over the packing up of luggages. A great many people left it.

The king, without, in the least degree acquainting himself with all these things, took his abode exclusively in *Chittavisram.* At present one passion was predominant in him—the passion of wrath. It was all-pervading—all-devouring. Leaving others, this passion became the bitterest towards Sree.

In a hurriedly altered mood, Sitaram now ordered some of his vile servitors of loathsome pursuits to fetch for his enjoyment, in

Chittavisram, all the women of the town, who were endued with personal charms. The vile procurers, thereupon, dispersed in groups all over the territory. The woman, who was found enamoured of money, they bought over by lucre ; the immaculate, they secured forcibly. Thus there arose another cry of oh and alas over the one already raised.

Things had been brought to this stage, when the reverend Chandrachoorh, without consulting anybody, packed up his luggages and, attended by a carrier carrying them on his head, set out on a pilgrimage. In the way he fell in with Chand Shaha Faquir. The latter enquired :—"Your Holiness! whither are you going ?"

Chandra :—To Benares. And, pray, which is your way ?

Chand :—To Mecca.

Chandra :—Are you going on a pilgrimage ?

The Faquir :—A country, which has Hindoos among its populace, I'll no more make my abode. This lesson has been taught me by Sitaram.

CHAPTER XX

With a light heart Yayanti, now, emerged from Mahammadpur. Her mind knew not a moment's affliction—it was never happier. While traversing her way, she fell to communion in the following manner :—" Great God, illimitable is Thine mercy ! To Thy dignity, no one can put a period. The person, who knoweth Thee not, contemplateth Thee not, seeth a thousand dangers, sprung up around him. What, O Lord ! is called a peril ? I know it not. The situation, Thou didst place me in, was felicitous in the extreme. So long I could not perceive, as at present, that I was off the tracks of religion, because I was vain, conceited and egotistical. Arjoon invoked Thee. So do I—Lord teach me correct me !"

"Tell me, Oh ! what best suits me ;
As pupil I look to thee
For succour ; O Lord, rule me !"

Yayanti had so accustomed her mind to the contemplation of God that she could, when necessary, conjure up His form before her mind's eye,and converse with Him. She had habituated herself to unbosom everything before the Maintainer of the Universe. Like a girl, hanging upon the gown of her parent, Yayanti had taught herself to importune the Supreme Father. Her present importunity was in Sitaram's behalf. "The course", said she unto herself, "which Sitaram is pursuing, is only calculated to hurry him on into downright ruin. His downfall is by no means distant. Is there nothing to save him ? In the inexhaustible store of mercy, is there not a drop for him ?" This was what occupied Yayanti's mind. Her reflection was :—"I know, He responds to one's call. Sitaram invokes Him no more ; he has forgotten to invoke Him

or else, why should ruin overtake him in this way? I am aware, that the sinner's only punishment is to forget to call the All-merciful. That's why Sitaram has become oblivious of him. He, no longer, takes his name. But let him take it or not, as he chooses. Should I invoke Him in Sitaram's behalf, would He not listen to me? Should I hang upon my Father's gown, and ask, that this sinful Sitaram shall be reclaimed from the trammels of sin, would he not turn an attentive ear? Omnipotent Lord, victory is the portion of *Thy* name alone! Sitaram must be rescued (from the ways of vice)."

Yayanti then thought :—"The Holy One never listen to the inactive. Should I not myself endeavour to effect his rescue, why would the Almighty listen to my prayer? However, we shall see. Sree must be found out at the initial stage. Sree has not acted wisely in having fled. Or, who can say what should have happened, had she not fled? What is my power to see through the chain of events, directed by the Holy One?"

And Yayanti went upon a visit to Sree. In due time, she appeared before her, and detailed every particular: A dark cloud of anguish swept over the countenance of Sree. She said :—"The king's downfall is next door. Is there nothing to rescue him?"

Yayanti :—His rescue rests with the Holy one. He has forgotten God. The day, he remembers Him, shall see his rise again.

Sree :—By what means can *that* be effected? So long as I was with him, I talked to him on nothing, but subjects connected with God; and he too seemed all attention.

Yayanti :—He paid attention, because the accents dropped from *your* lips. In wrapt admiration, he gazed agape on your features. He was captivated at the loveliness of your charms and the sweet music of your voice. Divine subjects never reached his ears. Did he ever reply to any of your queries? Did he, at any time, ask you for the elucidation of certain intricate points? Did you ever mark him manifest any enthusiasm at the name of Hari?

Sree :—No, I did not mark that.

Yayanti :—Then rest sure the attention was to your loveliness and not to the divine subjects on which you talked.

Sree :—Then, what course is to be adopted at present?

Yayanti :—Will you adopt the only course left? You've already

had me to understand, that you are an ascetic—you've renounced all actions.

Sree :—Precisely as you taught me.

Yayanti :—Did I inculcate that ? Did I not teach you, that the action, which is a performable one,—the constant performance of such an action without any selfish attachment, or without expecting any benefit from it,—is called renunciation of actions, and nothing else?* Is not the tending of your husband a performable action ?

Sree :—Wherefore did you then advocate flying ?

Yayanti :—Because you told me, that the king was one of the 12 enemies you had. Since you had not succeeded in conquering your desires, the tending of your husband would have been interested. Without disinterestedness, no performance can amount to the renunciation of actions. That's why I advised you to run away. Never do I give one a burthen, which one is quite unfit for. You cannot possibly have forgotten the simile :—"Under the feet of the drone alone can bear up the delicate &c. &c. &c. &c."

Sree was very much ashamed. After some reflection, she said :—"I'll answer to-morrow."

Accordingly the topic was no more touched upon, neither did Sree give Yayanti much of her company, that day. At length Yayanti approached her and asked :—"What's your reply to my query, *sannyasini ?*"

Sree :—Test me once again.

Yayanti :—Agreed. Then let us to Mahammadpur. While walking, we will decide what is to be the performable action of you and me alike.

The two then took the direction of Mahammadpur.

* Regarding it as one, that should be done, when work, that is prescribed in the scriptures is done, O Arjoona ! abandoning attachment and fruit, that abandonment is deemed of the quality of goodness."—Geeta : Sec. XLII. 9. (Trans. by Babu K. M. Ganguli.)

CHAPTER XXI

Gangaram had gone; Rama had died; Sree had fled; and Yayanti, Chandrachoorh, and Chand Shaha had quitted Mahammadpur. Yet Sitaram was far from opening his eyes.

Only Mrinmaya and Nanda were still left to him. Nanda's anger now surpassed the fair limits of indulgence. A woman's fidelity could no longer keep it at bay. But Nanda had none to succour her. All her hopes of assistance were now centred in Mrinmaya. With a view, therefore, to decide upon her course of action under the existing circumstances, she now summoned Mrinmaya. But, alas! human summons proved quite unavailing in bringing him once again into her presence. Mrinmaya was no longer in the land of the living; he had breathed his last that morning.

On leaving his couch early that morning, Mrinmaya had heard, that the Mahamedan force was marching towards the town—had nearly arrived. It had already reached the precincts of the fort. Mrinmaya had been thunder-struck to hear the news. He had been quite unprepared for a battle. Chandrachoorh's withdrawal from Mahammadpur had deprived Sitaram's government of the services of secret spies and scouts; and news of the enemys' movements could no longer have been brought in before-hand. In order, therefore, to get at the true state of things, Mrinmaya had mounted his steed and galloped away. After achieving a certain distance, he had been confronted by the Mahamedan force. To fly had been foreign to him. He had, therefore, been attacked by the enemies and slain.

The Mahamedan army now advanced and beseized Sitaram's fort. Those of the citizens, that yet remained, now took to their heels and, as a matter of fact, the town fell into the greatest pos-

sible disorder. The news of this was delivered to Sitaram at *Chittavisram* where, surrounded by a bevy of fair ones, he was quite intoxicated with his sensual enjoyments. He became aware, that Mrinmaya had died, and that the Moslem force had beseized the fort. And he said unto himself:—"This day, then, is to be the last—the last day of luxury—the last day of enjoyment of the diadem—the last day of existence." The king, thereupon, separated himself from his mistresses and rose upon his feet.

The luxurious creature cried out:—"Whither do you go, Great King? Leaving us here, where do you mean to go?"

Sitaram ordered the body-guard to "whip them away."

Amidst a peal of the merriest laughter, the courtezans burst out into the exclamation of the name of Hari. One of the beauties, named Bhanumati, quieted the rest. Then, confronting the monarch, she said:—"To-day, my liege! you must have been convinced, that there is such a thing, as Retributive Justice, in this world? We are the daughters of rank and respect. You have deflowered us, and, thereby, have thrown ignominy on our family. Have you not thought there would be the most righteous retribution? The mother of the one of us, or the father of the second; the husband of the third, or the infant of the fourth is weeping. Do you imagine, that their cries have not been registered in heaven? No more to a town, my Sire! but betake yourself to wilderness. Do not show yourself in localities, peopled by human beings; but always keep in memory, that there is such a thing in the world, as Retritutive Justice."

But instead of vouchsafing a reply to this address, the king now vaulted upon the back of his horse and made for the gate of the castle, as if borne on the wings of the wind. The youthful charmers ran after him. Some of them said:—"Come, come, sister! let us plunder the palace!" The second added:—"Let us gloat over the ruin of Sitaram!" while the third retorted:—"Well, Sitaram is going to surrender himself to *Allah*; let us follow in his wake." But these utterances had no place in the royal ears. His auricular cavities were quite filled, as it were, with the impassioned and impressive sentiments of Bhanumati. The king now admitted to himself, that certainly there was retributive justice in the world.

Having arrived at the gate of the castle, the king, now, saw, that

the Mahamedans had not yet beseized it; they were only approaching. Their pioneers—the dust, the banner and the cavalry—were dispersing in every direction and occupying their respective posts; while the principal detachment was marching in the direction of the gate.

The king made a reconnoitre of the garrison. He saw, that the soldiers had nearly all deserted. We need hardly tell the readers, that, not having been regularly paid, they had taken their departure long ago. Of the few, who yet adhered, almost every one now left on hearing of the death of Mrinmaya, and the advent of the Moslem army. A handful of Brahmans and Rajputs, who still remained, were, to the backbone, devoted to their master. They belonged to that class of men, who, when once they partake of a master's bounties, can never forget them. And their number, upon counting, was found to come up to 50 or thereabouts. The king said unto himself :—"Of sins, I have already had enough. I'll let these people live out the normal span of their life. *Judicium Dei* is not dead yet."

The king, likewise, saw, that of officials, there was none. With their lives and earthly belongings, every one had escaped. Of domestics, too, there were none. Intent on laying down their lives along with their master, only a few of the old servants and maids, the king now encountered occupying the castle, with eyes brimful with rheum.

To the inner apartment, the monarch now repaired, and found it was alike deserted by kins, friends, and relatives. In fact, every one, tenanting it, had escaped with his own dear life. That vast mansion now appeared, like a wilderness, lonely, still, and dark. And tears glistened in the eyes of Sitaram.

On one point, however, was the king certain—Nanda would never desert him. Nor had she a place to betake herself to. And, wiping away his tears, he now went in quest of Nanda. At that moment the cannon of the enemies boomed. They had already approached and, having beseized the castle, were attempting a breach in the walls. Great was the uproar ; it traversed the walls of the inner apartment, and struck upon the ears of the inmates.

Having reached Nanda's quarter, the king saw, that she lay on the bare floor ; and her own children as well as the son of Rama had gathered around her. They were weeping. On the king making

his appearance, Nanda burst out into the exclamation :—"Alas, my lord ! what have you done ?"

The king replied :—"I've done precisely what my destiny foreshadowed. I led, to the altar, a woman, who was to become the cause of her husband's death. It is her spell, that has grounded this destructive instinct in me."

Nanda :—Sire ! would you have to understand 'twas Sree ?

The king :—Certainly, I allude to Sree.

Nanda :—Then she, whom we knew to be the witch, was Sree ? But wherefore did you not let us into the fact for such a long time, my liege ?" And even at that last moment, Nanda's features relaxed into satisfactfon.

The king :—Of what avail would it have proved ? The witch, or Sree—the result has been all the same in the end. Death now stares me in the face.

Nanda :—My sovereign ! the paths of mortal life lead but to death ; and never do I sorrow for that. But you would fall fighting at the head of hundred thousand warriors, and I should follow you close upon your heels—why not destiny has brought this about ?

The king :—At this moment, I have not got hundred thousand warriors,—not even 100 warriors. Still, however, I will fall fighting ; and none can prevent that. In another instant, I will unlock the gate and push my way into the thickest of the Mahamedan force. So, here am I to speak to you and take my weapons.

The tears now streamed forth in torrents from Nanda's eyes. She, however, wiped them away and observed :—"Should I resist you in your resolve, in that case, I would not deserve the position of ministering to your comforts. It is sufficient, that you have regained the healthy tone of your mind. I only wish you recovered it a little earlier. You shall die, my liege ! So will I—I will follow close upon your heels. My only care is—What's to become of these helpless infants. As sure as night follows the day, they will fall into the hands of the Mahamedans !"

And Nanda drenched the floor itself with her tears. The king said :—"That's why you must not die yet awhile. For the care of these little ones, you shall live."

Nanda :—Do you mean to say, that my life alone will ensure them safety ?

The king :—Nanda, so many have escaped ! Why have you not followed their example ? In that case, at least, these innocent creatures might have been saved !

Nanda :—*Your* bride, my liege! whom should I have accompanied in my escape ? Without your permission, could I have entrusted *your* children to alien hands ? A son, or a daughter is simply the way to piety. *You* are my piety. Should I have left you in preference to children ?

The king :—But how to creep out of the difficulty ?

Nanda :—I see no means, unless, indeed, the Mahamedans pity the helpless. If they do not, then assuredly to the care of the Almighty, must they be resigned. My liege ! they have got the royal blood circulating in their veins. A royal family is the butt, alike, of weal and of woe. And not for a moment do I entertain care for that. But what troubles me, at this moment, is lest anybody should call you a coward.

The king :—Then leave everything to the divine will. This perhaps is our last meeting.

Without further utterance, the king now entered the armoury. Accompanied by the children, Nanda followed him thither. The king now fell to arraying himself in martial panoply ; and engaged in dashing away tears Nanda went on surveying him in company of the children.

Arrayed in warlike apparel and girting various weapons about his person, Sitaram once more shone like Sitaram. Then goaded on by his own heroic pride, and intent only on embracing death, he now took the direction of the gate, alone and unattended. Once again, Nanda lay on the bare floor and began to shed tears.

While proceeding towards the gate of the castle, thus alone, the king's eyes were attracted to two human figures, seated on the platform, on the top of which Yayanti had been conducted to receive the punishment of whipping. The spectacle infused terror into the mind, even, of that death-courting warrior. In extreme eagerness, he advanced and saw, that, with a trident in hand, and decked out in *gairic* and *rudraksha*, was Yayanti herself seated with her feet hang-

ing by the side of the platform. Beside her, was Sree, in the kindred attire of a Bhairabi.

At that perilous moment, when death was closing in its wings around him, the king became quite dismayed and terrified to meet them there thus attired. He asked :—"Wherefore have ye forced your way hither, when I am about to pass from the known, into the unknown, world? Have ye not still had your heart's desire pandered to?"

A faint smile wreathed Yayanti's lips. To the king, Sree's voice sounded "low and deep," and her eyes appeared brimful with tears. She wished to speak, but her tongue refused to utter the words, that wavered on her lips. The king went on surveying her countenance. Sree spoke not.

At length the king said :—"Sree, 'tis *thy* destiny, that has found fulfilment! It is thou, who hast let death loose upon me. As the cause of thy dear one's death, I was right in having disespoused thee. However, destiny is fulfilled at last. Wherefore hast thou made thy appearance again?

Sree :—I have got performable actions; so am I here to attend to them. To-day you are to die; and I'm to die along with you.

The king :—Does a woman of self-abnegation mount the pyre of her husband.

Sree ,—A woman of ascetic austerities, or one, belonging to the domestic sphere, everybody has a right to die.

The king :—A woman of renunciation has no action. Thou hast renounced all actions. Wherefore shouldst thou follow me in my death. *My* path to the door of Death, Nanda is to follow, and she is prepared. You live to attend to your self-abnegation.

Sree :—Illustrious Sovereign! since you have not been annoyed with me for such a long time, do not,—Oh! do not, I beseech you—be angry with me to-day. The offence, I have committed in respect to you, I have seen at this moment, when both you and I are hovering between the confines of the two worlds. Here—bringing my head in contact with thy feet—

With these words, Sree descended from the platform and, prostrating herself at Sitaram's feet, she cried out :—"Here—with my hand, resting on your feet—do I declare, that no longer am I a

sannyasini. Will you forgive me ? Will you take me as your wife again ?

Sita :—Well, I took thee with the choicest endearments imaginable. But now 'tis too late.

Sree :—Not at all late, when I have time enough to die.

Sita :—It is thou that art my only bride.

Sree took the dust of Sitaram's feet. Yayanti said :—"I'm a beggar-woman. I bless, from this day till eternity, both of you shall be blended with victory."

Sita:—Maternal Lady ! by me thou hast been rather too greatly sinned against. That thou hast come here to gloat over my ruin, I do not imagine. Thy benediction alone convinces me of thy godly disposition. Now, then, tell me, pray, what atonement may propitiate thee ? Hark ! the Mahamedans' cannon booms. In another instant I will surrender myself to the muzzle of the cannon yonder. Tell me, I entreat thee, while yet there is time, what may secure for me thy forgiveness and mercy ?"

Yayanti :—But on another occasion, quite unaided, you defended the castle !

The king :—That is out of the question to-day. There's a great deal of difference between land and water. There breathes not a soul in the world, who, unaided, can protect the fort to-day.

Yayanti :—But even at this moment, there are fifty men, ready to fly to your banner !

The king :—Dost thou hear the tumult ? To that legion of troops, of what practical use may fifty men prove ? My own life, I may lay down whenever I like—in what manner I choose. But, for nothing, why should I lay, on my own conscience, the blood of innocence and devoted service ? By precipitating into the battle with fifty men, one can expect no other result than certain death.

Sree :—As for myself, or Nanda—our course is already decided, and that is to die. But Nanda and Rama have got a few children. Can nothing help them into safety ?

Tears now trickled from Sitaram's eyes. He said :—"Oh ! none, indeed. What help can I proffer ?"

Yayanti observed :—"August Sovereign ! there is certain help of the helpless ; don't you know it ? Yes, you know it as well as one

may; or rather you knew it, but intoxicated with the splendour of your diadem, you have suffered yourself to forget it. But don't you, even now, remember that Help of the helpless—the Guide of the benighted?"

Sitaram drooped his head. It was at this moment—after the lapse of such a long time—that the thought of the Help of the helpless—the Guide of the benighted, rushed back into his brain. The dark clouds were dispersed by the wind; and once again, in his mental sky, the rays of the sun began slowly and gradually to glimmer. A further reflection, all in an instant, disclosed that super-natural lustre, which exhibits the endless universe.

Sitaram now fell to communion. "O Lord!" said he, "O Lord, of the indigent! the Friend of the friendless! the Help of the helpless! the Guide of the benighted! the Refuge of the righteous! the Succour of the sinful! wilt thou not show me mercy, because I am a sinner?"

Having observed, that Sitaram had fallen, heart and soul, to the contemplation of the Almighty, Yayanti flung upon Sree a glance of deep meaning. Then, hastily sinking upon their knees on the top of the platform, both of them, with united palms and upturned countenances, began to pray; their blended voice—the voice, which was wafted up to the skies, and seemed to be cleaving them, and which put the sweet carolings of the woodland warblers to shame—sending forth echoes all round the immense castle,

"Thou art the first God, the Original Male,
The best Refuge of this universe;
The only knower, the thing to be to be known.
Thou, the only place of abode;
O, thou, the Holy one, in form infinite,
By thee this universe is pervaded."

—*Gita, II, 38.*

Beyond the walls of the castle, was the outcry of the Mahamedan soldiery, like the uproar of the ocean. The terrible report of the cannon, called into requisition to bombard the walls, were echoed in fields, and forests, and the bends of the river. The interior of the fort was lonely; and save for the existence of the echoed outcry, it was still. And, disturbing that stillness, the solemn psalm, taking

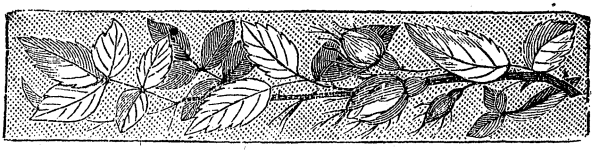
notice of all the seven tones in existence, and coming out of the incomparable throat of Yayanti and Sree—the type and personification of wisdom and devotion—rent its way up to the welkin, and caused Sitaram's hair to stand on end,

"I bow to thee a thousand times;
And again and again I bow
To thee; I bow to thee in front,
And also from behind I bow:
I bow to thee from every side;
O (merciful) thou that art all."

—*Gita, 11, 39*

The melody, thus poured into his ears quite enchanted Sitaram. He forgot, for the moment, the perils that faced him; and, with united palms of his hands and upturned countenance, like one bewildered, he began to shed tears for joy. Once again, his heart became purified. With a voice, filling the vault of heaven, Yayanti and Sree went on invoking :—"Hari! Hari! Hari! O Hari! Hari! Hari! Hari! O Hari!"

Things came to this stage, when there arose a great hue and cry in the interior of the castle, and a sound was heard exclaiming :—"Victory to the Great King! Victory to Sitaram!"



CHAPTER XXII

The reader needs scarcely be reminded, that the soldiers had their quarters in the castle itself. It has likewise been said, that all the soldiers had left the garrison and run away. About fifty men, including Brahmans and Rajputs, all true to their salt, had not deserted. They were all chosen soldiers. Or else, they would never have stuck to the last without wages, but, die certain deaths. These men became very much displeased. The Mahomedan army had already approached. They were making a tremendous noise. The boomings of their cannon were shaking the earth, while the fiery balls, it vomitted forth, were bombarding the walls of the castle; yet nobody commanded them to be clad. The king had come in person and reconnoitred the garrison. But not he even had commanded them to be panoplied. There they stayed behind, only to lay down their lives, and for no other reward. But not that even seemed to be within reasonable expectation. None would say:—"Come, lay down your lives for me!" As a matter of course, their displeasure outstripped all indulgence.

A council was now held. Raghubir Misser was the eldest in years and the highest in rank. He came forward and reasoned with the rest. He said:—"Brethren, if you remain cooped up within these four walls, the Mahamedans will enter and poke you to death. And do you think that desirable? Come, let's die like men! Let's dress ourselves and go to the battle. Nobody has commanded you, you say? Oh! that be damned. Who ever awaits a command, or a permission to die? We've partaken of the king's bounties; and 'tis our duty to fight for him. But should we not do so, because none has commanded us? Command, or no command, let's to the war!"

The proposition was accepted by everybody present. Gyadin Pande, however, raised the question,—"How are we to fight? Under the existing circumstances, cannon is the only means of the castle's safety. But the gunners have all fled away. We are not so very skilled in the manipulation of the cannon. What sort of a battle, then, shall it be?

The question gave rise to a hot discussion. Durmad Sing, the Jamadar, observed:—"What's the use of so much discussion? We have got our weapons—we have got our steeds—we have, likewise, got the king in the fort. Let us, then, well armed and well mounted, go into the presence of the king and solicit order. Whatever command the great prince issues, we'll obey."

Everybody present admitted the proposal to be the best, and approved of it. They, then, finished a hurried outfit for the battle, and harnessed their own steeds. Thus armed and mounted, and in an ebulition of heroic pride, they rattled their weapons and, in a stentorian voice, exclaimed—"Victory to the August King!" "Victory to King Sitaram!"

It was this exclamation, that had struck upon Sitaram's ears.

CHAPTER XXIII

With triumphant exaclamations on their lips, the soldiers, now, in a line arrived at the place where, on the top of the platform, Sitaram was drinking in the melody of the psalm, sung by Yayanti and Sree. They then burst forth into fresh acclamations.

Raghubir Misser enquired :—"What's the royal mandate ? Your Highness' order, and we drive away this handful of shaven heads."

Sitaram replied : – "You just wait here for a while. I'll be back in a few minutes."

And the king entered the harem. In the meantime, with attention undivided, minds undisturbed, and themselves undiverted from the theme, the troops listened to the celestial ode of the two women of self-abnegation.

In due time, the monarch reappeared, with a litter following him. We have already mentioned, that the domestics, attached to the royal establishment, had all fled. We have, likewise, stated, that a few of the old servants had not deserted. It was they, who now carried the litter. Inside it, was Nanda, accompanied by the children.

The king, now, approached the troops and having arrayed them in a line, he made them into a cubic phalanx, in terms of the rules of olden times. Then, having placed the litter, carrying Nanda, in its gap, he mounted his steed and posted himself at the angle of the phalanx. He then called Yayanti and Sree and said :— "Wherefore do you stay outside ? Better enter the vacuum of the triangle."

Both Yayanti and Sree smiled and replied :—"We are women of renunciation. We see no difference between life and death."

Without any further parley, Sitaram shouted out :—"Victory to

thee, O God! Victory to thee, O Lukshminarayanaji!" and he proceeded towards the gate, the little cubic phalanx closely following him. Quite undeterred, the two female ascetics, now, came in front of the king's horse and, flourishing their tridents, they led the way, with acclamations, similar to the ensuing one, on their lips :—

"Victory to Siva, Sankara,
—The extirpator of Tripura—
In war whose mien is terrible,
Victory to Him and Him alone.
He who wields the disc and the mace
—Krisna who wears a yellow wrap—
Victory unto Hari and Hara,
Victory to Them and Them alone."

Surprised the king said :—"What do you mean? In another moment you'll be crushed to death!"

Sree replied :—Your Highness! do *sannyasinis* stand in greater fear of death than monarchs?" But Yayanti held her own counsel. Yayanti had ceased to be a braggart. The king, seeing, that the women were not at all docible, spoke not a syllable more.

Having, now, approached the gate, the king unlocked it with his own hands and drew back the bolt. The massive portals gave out a sharp, shrill sound, which was echoed in the vaulted roof of the main entrance. The trampling of the horses' hoops were alike echoed. Forced by the tide of the ocean of the Mahamedan force, that huge and heavy iron gate swung back on its hinges. Having observed the gate thus opened, the horses, carrying the troops, composing the cubic phalanx, now began to dance.

Like a flood tide, rushing through a breach in an embankment with the fury of a mountain water-fall, the Mahomedan army now dashed onward, by the opened gate. But scarcely were they confronted by Sree and Yayanti, when that vast army became as immobile as a charmed snake. To the universal fascination of their personal charms, "too fine to inhabit this gross world," they had combined a certain novelty of costume, an amazing and unheard-of bravery, and the all-absorbing magic of that triumphant psalm. The Mahamedans mistook them for the protecting angels of the town and, in awe, made way for them. They passed on and on

through the Mahamedan force, clearing their way at the point of the tridents. The king was thus enabled, thanks to the way afforded by the tridents, to lead the phalanx on through the foemen. Sitaram was no longer walking in flesh; but he was walking with God. He was bent, only by communion, upon being as completely wrapped up in divine contemplation as possible, at the moment of mortalty. It was therefore, that Sitaram was devoid of cares, steady, unerring, cheerful, and smiling. Having drunk in the melodious name of Hari from the lips of the Bhairabis, he had turned his mind upon the deity and had conquered himself. What contemptible thing was the Mahamedan army in his eyes at the moment?

At the sight of his rapturous countenance, and his little, yet victorious corps, the Mahamedans thundered forth :—"Let them die," "let them die." None, however, raised a finger against the two women. Everybody shrank out of their way. But Sitaram and his band, they attacked from every side. At *his* command, however, his band did not stop anywhere for an instant, to confront the enemies; they only pushed onward. A good many of them received mortal wounds; while others, being killed outright, dropped from their steeds. The vacant places were, the next moment, occupied by those that were behind. In this way, Sitaram's cubic phalanx was enabled intact to press onward, through the enemies, its onward course being cleared by Yayanti and Sree. Dreadful was the attack on the soldiers. But the example, the exhortations, the perseverence, and the training of Sitaram enabled them to overcome every difficulty and push onward without casting a glance on either side. They proceeded on and on in their career either wounded or killed, or else got trampled under the feet of their horses everybody, who sought to retard their progress.

This curious proceeding now induced the Mahamedan General to send a cannon to be placed opposite the cubic phalanx, in order to check Sitaram's further progress. They had already placed the cannon in proper places to make a bombardment of castle walls. They had, therefore, not been able to call them into requisition to arrest Sitaram's onward career. Now, however, that the General saw, that the royal couple were escaping, with utmost,care and trouble he removed one of the cannons, and sent it to be placed right

opposite the phalanx. But he could not afford to lend his own services, in as much as seeing, that the portals of the fort stood open, most of the Mahamedan soldiers were rushing in to plunder it. As a matter of course, he could not but be present there to see that the dues of the Subadar should not have been misappropriated by others. In the meanwhile, the cannon was brought over and placed to oppose the phalanx. Sitaram's partisans now gave up all hopes. But with Sree 'twas different. Sree and Yayanti now hastily advanced and confronted the cannon. Fixing her regards upon the countenance of Yayanti, Sree smiled and, placing her bosom at the muzzle of the cannon, she gazed around, when a modest, mild, cheerful, and triumphant smile appeared upon her lips. Yayanti, also, surveyed the features of her companion. Thence she transfered her glances to the countenance of the gunner, and a kindred smile played upon her lips, too. By those glances they seemed to convey to each other, as intelligibly as if in words spoken, that they had won the cannon. At this the gunner flung down the wick, he held in his hand and outwitted he shrank at a distance from the cannon. In the meantime, Sitaram rushed onward and flourished his cutlass to kill the gunner. Thereupon, Yayanti cried out:—"No rashness, Powerful King; but mercy." "Mercy to an enemy, indeed!" retorted the monarch, and with the flourished cutlass he decapitated the gunner, and took possession of the gun. The next instant, Sitaram called into his own aid the agility and the matchless training, he possessed, to turn the cannon and clear the onward way of the cubic phalanx. In his hands, the cannon began to boom loud and incessant like thunder at the time of destruction. At the ceaseless shower of iron-balls, the Mahamedans cleared out of its way and dispersed on every side. Thus, the further onward progress of the cubic phalanx was no longer impeded. Without any difficulty Sitaram now cut his way through the Moslem force and led his queen, his children as well as the surviving soldiers to a place of safety. The Mahamedans now fell to pillaging this castle.

Thus was Sitaram's monarchy destroyed.

CHAPTER XXIV

After night-fall, Sree met Yayanti in a secluded spot and enquired :—"Yayanti ! who was the gunner ?

Yayanti :—You allude to the one, whom the king beheaded ?

Sree :—The same. Wherefore did you forbid the king to decapitate him ?

Yayanti :—What, on earth, will a *sannyasini* gain from the information ?

Sree :—Oh ! let it call forth a tear, if it does at all. That does not endanger the paths of renunciation.

Yayanti :—But a tear, even, why should it call forth ?

Sree :—While yet alive, I could not make him out. But marking, that you forbade the king, I observed the features of the corpse a little. A doubt has arisen in my mind. Whoever the man might be, I was the sole cause of his death. He must, of a verity, have fired the cannon, if I did not place my bosom at the muzzle In that case, the king must have been killed, and who should have killed *him* then ?

Yayanti :—*His* death has ensured the king his own life ; and you've done what was your proper duty. What's then, the use of talking about it any more ?

Sree :—Still the doubt must be removed.

Yayanti :—Why such unseemly anxiety on the part of a *sannyasini ?*

Sree :—A *sannyasini* or not, human nature shall ever remain human nature. I, certainly, knew you to be one of the deities. But since you yourself could not help being overwhelmed with bashful-

ness before a body of spectators, why talk of the immolation of my renunciation ?

Yayanti :—Then, come, we'll have this doubt removed. I have left a mark there, which will draw us to the correct spot, though 'tis night. But we must carry a light.

They then made a torch of straw and, lighted by the flambeau, they repaired to the battle field. The mark, left by Yayanti, took them to their destination. After a prolonged search by the light of the torch, they, at last, succeeded in finding out the dead body of the gunner. But Sree was still dubious. Yayanti, thereupon, snatched the ample wig of grey hair, with which the head of the gunner was covered, and the peruque came off. She, then, pulled the grey beard, which also yielded. Sree was no longer doubtful—'twas Gangaram.

Tears now trickled in quick succession down Sree's cheeks. Yayanti said :—"Sister ! if you are so weak as to give way to a grief like this, wherefore did you embrace renunciation !"

Sree :—For no fault of mine, the king took me to task. I have not been the cause of *his* death ; but I have been a fratricide. Destiny is fulfilled at last.

Yayanti :—Nobody ever knows, through whom the Holy One means to deal punishment on one. Through *your* intercession, Gangaram was twice saved. But that identical you have now turned into the cause of his destruction. However, Gangaram had sinned, and he came to sin again. Methinks he was not aware of Rama's death. With a view to make her the dupe of a disguise and thereby to possess her, he had enlisted himself a gunner in the Mahamedan army. Perhaps he had thought, that Rama would never have thrown herself into his arms, if she could know him. Perhaps, moreover, he thought, that the litter was tenanted by Rama. He, therefore, sought to arrest its onward career. Be that as it may. Instead of shedding these unavailing tears, let us to the cremation.

The two, then, carried the corpse of Gangaram to the proper place between themselves, and reduced it to ashes.

Yayanti and Sree no more sought the presence of Sitaram. That very night, they made themselves invisible—as if dissolved into the darkness itself—nobody knew, whither.

THE CONCLUSION.

Ramchand and Shamchand, our two friends, already introduced to the reader, had long ago taken to flight, and were, at present, inhabiting Naldanga. There, in an *atchala*,* they were engaged in a conversation.

Ram :—Now, then, brother ! do you know anything of Mahammadpur ?

Sham :—Oh, yes ! 'twas already known. The Mahamedans have taken possession of the castle and its environments, and have pillaged them.

Ram :—Are you informed of what happened to the royal couple ?

Sham :—They say, they were sent over to Moorsidabad in heavy chains. There, they are said to have been impaled.

Ram :—Such is my information, too. But, then, rumour says, that they had put a period to their own existence by swallowing poison. Then the fellows carried the two dead bodies over and mounted them each on a pale.

Sham :—As many lips, so many versions. Some people again say, that the royal couple were not at all arrested. That deity had come and spirited them away. Then the Mahamedans set up a man and a woman, palmed them off as the royal couple, and impaled them.

Ram :—Pshaw ! those are the inventions of our Hindoo brain—mere folk-tales.

Sham :—But how to distinguish whether the one is a folk-tale, or the other ? The latter may be a Mahamedan coinage. But let them pass. We are so many dealers in ginger ; we need not rack our brains with the thoughts of big ships. We must thank our stars, that we could have cleared out safe enough. Now, let me see how you can refill the *chilum* ! †

Let Ramchand and Shamchand replenish the *chilum*, and regale themselves. In the mean-time we conclude the work.

THE END.

---

* A large hut, the roof of which consists of 8 thatches. Hence the name.

† A little earthen bowl, analogous in use to a chibouque in vogue in the ottoman capital.